N, GOD, AND IMMORTALITY

SIR JAMES GEORGE FRAZER

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MAN, GOD AND IMMORTALITY

THOUGHTS ON HUMAN PROGRESS

PASSAGES CHOSEN FROM THE WRITINGS OF

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TO

MY WIFE

THE INSPIRER OF MY EFFORTS

THE ONLY BEGETTER OF THIS VOLUME

PREFACE

In this volume are collected some of the more general conclusions to which my studies of early society and religion led me in past years, and for the convenience of readers who lack the leisure or the taste to pursue the subject in detail they have been disengaged from the heavy masses of facts on which they are founded. There is no doubt a certain risk in thus divorcing conclusions from premises, in presenting generalizations without the particulars from which they have been deduced, and I would not have adopted a procedure so contrary to my usual practice if it were not that the evidence for my deductions had been fully set forth in the works from which these passages have been detached, and to which I would refer the curious or sceptical reader for more exact information on all points. The volume has been compiled under my direction by my friend Pierre Sayn, who is in large measure responsible both for the choice of the passages and for the order in which they are arranged. I am grateful to him for the taste and judgement, as well as for the diligence and accuracy, with which he has performed his task, and I cannot but admire the skill with which he has pieced the fragments together into a mosaic of a regular pattern. I have added some passages, shifted a few, and prefixed titles

to all. Further, I have changed a few words here and there to fit the pieces into their new setting or to improve my original expression, and occasionally I have appended a footnote for the benefit of readers who may be unfamiliar with the subject. For their sake also I have made a fairly full index, and I have explained a few hard words in the notes; but here as elsewhere I have been very sparing in the use of such terms, believing that the simple ways and simple thoughts of primitive folk, with whom I am chiefly concerned, can best be described in simple language.

While the volume has, I trust, a certain unity of design, it is hardly necessary to warn the reader that it does not pretend to exhibit even in outline a continuous picture, still less a history, of man's progress at any stage of his mental and social development. To paint such a picture, to write such a history, would call for a range of knowledge and a compass of mind to which I can lay no claim. All that I have attempted to do in the past is to study some phases of human evolution, and all that I have attempted in the present volume is to crystallize, as it were, the results of my studies into an optic glass which may afford the reader some momentary glimpses of the long march of humanity on the upward road from savagery to civilization. The march is still in progress and no doubt will continue without a halt when we are gone. Its destination is unknown, hidden in the mists of the future. If the marching columns should carry in their baggage any of my works, perhaps this book may be found in some of the knapsacks. At least I have sought to lighten the burden by throwing out a heavy load of facts. Yet, if I mistake not, my facts will be found in the long run to be more

valuable and more prized hereafter than my theories. For theories are shifting and transitory, while facts are permanent and eternal, if anything can be truly so called in this world of perpetual change. Accordingly I surmise that should my writings find a place on the shelves of our descendants, it will be rather for the sake of the quaint and barbarous customs and beliefs which they describe than for the theories by which I have tried to elucidate them. For we must always remember that books, like men, have their fate, and that the great bulk of them are destined to perish sooner or later. Among these short-lived volumes will doubtless be numbered many of those from which I have drawn precious materials for the composition of my own ; and when we of this age are ranked by posterity among the ancients, it may be that some of my books will still be read as records of a state of savagery and barbarism which has long passed away, and of which the original documents have perished. Meantime the present volume may perhaps have a temporary utility as a clue to guide students through the mazes of my larger works.

J. G. Frazer.

London,
26th June 1927.

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PART I

THE STUDY OF MAN

I

A NEW PROVINCE OF KNOWLEDGE[1]

The position of the anthropologist of to-day resembles in some sort the position of classical scholars at the revival of learning. To these men the rediscovery of ancient literature came like a revelation, disclosing to their wondering eyes a splendid vision of the antique world, such as the cloistered student of the Middle Ages never dreamed of under the gloomy shadow of the minster and within the sound of its solemn bells. To us moderns a still wider vista is vouchsafed, a greater panorama is unrolled by the study which aims at bringing home to us the faith and the practice, the hopes and the ideals, not of two highly gifted races only, but of all mankind, and thus at enabling us to follow the long march, the slow and toilsome ascent, of humanity from savagery to civilization. And as the scholar of the Renaissance found not merely fresh food for thought but a new field of labour in the dusty and faded manuscripts of Greece and Rome, so in the mass of materials that is steadily pouring in from many sides—from buried cities of remotest antiquity as well as from the rudest savages of the desert and the jungle—we of to-day must recognize a new province of knowledge which will task the energies of

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part I. *The Magic Art*, vol. i., Preface, pp. xxv-xxvi.

generations of students to master. The study is still in its rudiments, and what we do now will have to be done over again and done better, with fuller knowledge and deeper insight, by those who come after us. We of this age are only pioneers hewing lanes and clearings in the forest where others will hereafter sow and reap.

But the comparative study of the beliefs and institutions of mankind is fitted to be much more than a means of satisfying an enlightened curiosity and of furnishing materials for the researches of the learned. Well handled, it may become a powerful instrument to expedite progress if it lays bare certain weak spots in the foundations on which modern society is built—if it shows that much which we are wont to regard as solid rests on the sands of superstition rather than on the rock of nature. It is indeed a melancholy and in some respects thankless task to strike at the foundations of beliefs in which, as in a strong tower, the hopes and aspirations of humanity through long ages have sought a refuge from the storm and stress of life. Yet sooner or later it is inevitable that the battery of the comparative method should breach these venerable walls, mantled over with the ivy and mosses and wild flowers of a thousand tender and sacred associations. At present we are only dragging the guns into position: they have hardly yet begun to speak. The task of building up into fairer and more enduring forms the old structures so rudely shattered is reserved for other hands, perhaps for other and happier ages. We cannot foresee, we can hardly even guess, the new forms into which thought and society will run in the future. Yet this uncertainty ought not to induce us, from any consideration of expediency or regard for

antiquity, to spare the ancient moulds, however beautiful, when these are proved to be out-worn. Whatever comes of it, wherever it leads us, we must follow truth alone. It is our only guiding star : *hoc signo vinces.*

II

THE EVOLUTION OF MAN [1]

The study of savage society forms part of the general science of man or anthropology. That science is one of the latest born in the sisterhood of the sciences, being hardly older than about the middle of the nineteenth century ; in fact, the science is contemporary with not a few of its exponents who have not yet reached the extreme limit of old age. Not very many years have elapsed since two of its founders in England, Lord Avebury and Sir Edward Tylor, passed away. But, though young in years, the science has grown so rapidly that already it is hardly possible for any one man to embrace the whole of it. The principle of the division of labour, which is essential to economic progress, is no less essential to scientific progress. The time has gone by when the comprehensive intellect of an Aristotle or a Bacon could take all knowledge for its province. More and more each inquirer has to limit his investigations to a small patch of the field, to concentrate the glow-worm lamp of his intelligence on a tiny circle, almost a speck, in the vast expanse which we dimly perceive stretching out to infinity on every side of us. Only by multiplying these glow-worm lamps, glimmering side by

[1] "The Scope and Method of Mental Anthropology," *Science Progress*, No. 64, April 1922, pp. 580-583.

side, can we hope, step by step, to diffuse the light of knowledge through the boundless region of the unknown.

In our particular science the first broad and sharp division is between the study of man's body and the study of his mind. The one is known as physical anthropology; the other is now, at least in this country, commonly called social anthropology, but I should prefer to call it by the more general name of mental anthropology. For though man is no doubt pre-eminently a social being and probably owes a large part of his superiority as an animal to the strength of his gregarious instincts, these instincts are only part of his mental endowment, and even when we have abstracted them from our consideration, there still remains in the human mind much that deserves to be carefully studied and that naturally falls under the science of man. It is with mental, as distinguished from physical, anthropology that I shall be exclusively occupied in these pages.

But even when, in anthropology, we have limited our inquiries to the mind of man, the subject is still so vast that, if progress is to be made, some further subdivision of it becomes necessary. For the mind of man has for ages been investigated by a whole series of special studies, which, under the various names of psychology, logic, metaphysics, and ethics, sometimes summed up under the general title of philosophy, have made great and noble contributions to a science of man. What place, then, is there for the new study of mental anthropology beside these ancient studies? Is there room for her in the venerable college? Can she discharge a function which was not previously performed by her older sisters? We

think that she can, and to determine what that function is, we need only perhaps consider the date at which the modern science of anthropology as a whole was first taken up seriously and systematically. The birth of anthropology followed almost immediately the promulgation of the evolution theory by Darwin and Wallace in 1859. I think I am right in saying that the foundation of anthropological societies at home and abroad has everywhere been subsequent to that date and has followed it often at very short intervals. Be that as it may, the theory of the gradual evolution of man out of a long series of inferior forms of animal life is now generally accepted, though diversity of opinion still prevails as to the precise mode in which the evolution has been brought about. It is this conception of evolution which supplies a basis for the modern science of anthropology.

On the physical side human anatomy had been studied for centuries and was, I take it, firmly established on its main lines long before the appearance of Darwin; the new idea imported into the science was that the human body, like the bodies of all animals, is not a finished product, a fixed type, struck out by nature or created by God at a blow, but that it is rather a merely temporary effect, the result of a long process of what resembles growth rather than construction or creation, a growth which we have no reason to suppose has been arrested, but is probably still going on and may cause our descendants to differ as far from us as we now differ from our remotest ancestors in the scale of animate being. It is only the slowness of the process that hides the movement from our eyes and suggests the conclusion, so flattering to human vanity, that nature has reached her con-

summation in us and can no farther go. An immediate result of the promulgation of the evolution theory was thus to give an immense impulse to comparative anatomy; for it was now recognized that man's bodily frame is not an isolated structure, but that it is closely related to that of many of the other animals, and that the one structure cannot be fully understood without the other. Not the least important branch of what we may call the new anatomy was the science of embryology, which by a comparison of the human and animal embryos was able to demonstrate their close resemblance for a considerable period of their development, and thus to supply a powerful argument in favour of the conclusion, that man and what he calls the lower animals have had a common origin, and that for an incalculable time they probably pursued nearly parallel lines of evolution. In fact, embryology shows that the very process of evolution, which we postulate for the past history of our race, is summarily reproduced in the life-history of every man and woman who is born into the world.

Turning now from the physical to the mental side of man's nature, we may say that the evolution theory has in like manner opened up a new province of inquiry which has been left unoccupied by the older philosophy. Whenever in former days a philosopher set himself to inquire into the principles of the human mind, it was his own particular mind, or at most the minds of his civilized contemporaries, that he proceeded to investigate. When Descartes turned his eyes inwards and reflected on the operations of his own mind, he believed himself to be probing to the very deepest foundations accessible to human intelligence. It never occurred to him, I imagine, to apply

for information to the mind of a Zulu or a Hottentot, still less of a baboon or a chimpanzee. Yet the doctrine of evolution has rendered it highly probable that the mind of the philosopher is indissolubly linked to the minds of these barbarous peoples and strange animals, and that, if we would fully understand it, we must not disdain to investigate the intelligence of these our humble relations.

It is a corollary of the development theory that, simultaneously with the evolution of man's body out of the bodies of lower animals, his mind has undergone a parallel evolution, gradually improving from perhaps bare sensation to the comparatively high level of intelligence to which the civilized races have at present attained. And as in the evolution of the bodily form we know that many species of lower orders have survived side by side with the higher to our own day, so in the evolution of the mind we may infer that many of the existing races of mankind have lagged behind us, and that their various degrees of mental development represent various degrees of retardation in the evolutionary process, various stages in the upward march of humanity. I say the upward march, because we have good reason to believe that most, if not all, of these laggard races are steadily, though very slowly, advancing ; or at least that they were so till they came, for their misfortune, into fatal contact with European civilization. The old theory of the progressive degeneracy of mankind in general from a primitive state of virtue and perfection is destitute of even a rag of evidence. Even the more limited and tenable view that certain races have partially degenerated, rests, I believe, on a very narrow induction. Speaking for myself, I may say

that in my reading of savage records I have met with few or no facts which point clearly and indubitably to racial degeneracy. Even among the Australian aborigines, the least progressive of mankind, I have not, so far as I remember, noted the least sign that they once occupied a higher level of culture than that at which they were discovered by Europeans. On the contrary, many things in their customs and beliefs appear to me to plead very strongly in favour of the conclusion that aboriginal Australian society, so far as we can trace it backward, has made definite progress on the upward path from lower to higher forms of social life. That progress appears to have been assisted, if not initiated, in certain parts of Australia by favourable physical conditions, chiefly by a higher rainfall in the mountainous regions near the coast, with its natural consequence of a greater abundance of food, in contrast to the drought and sterility of the desert interior.

III

THE COMPARATIVE METHOD[1]

The province, then, of mental or social anthropology may be defined as the study of the mental and social conditions of the various races of mankind, especially of the more primitive races compared to the more advanced, with a view to trace the general evolution of human thought, particularly in its earlier stages. This comparative study of the mind of man is thus analogous to the comparative study of his body

[1] "The Scope and Method of Mental Anthropology," *Science Progress*, No. 64, April 1922, pp. 584-586.

which is undertaken by anatomy and physiology. But whereas comparative anatomy and physiology extend the range of their comparisons far beyond the human species so as to include the whole gamut of animate being, mental anthropology is content for the present to limit its comparisons to the members of our own kind. Yet the limitation is doubtless only temporary ; it is to be expected that in time a growing knowledge of the mental processes of the lower animals will permit of a comparison of them with the corresponding processes in the mind of man, a comparison which could hardly fail to throw light on many problems as yet unsolved.

But while in the interest of the science of man a greatly extended application of the comparative method is desirable and in the future inevitable, some well-meaning but injudicious friends of anthropology would limit the application of the method still more narrowly than I have assumed to be temporarily necessary or advisable. They would apparently refuse to allow us to compare the thoughts and institutions, the arts and crafts, of distant races with each other, and would only allow us to compare those of neighbouring races. A little reflection may convince us that any such restriction, even if it were practicable, would be unwise ; nay, that, were it enforced, it would be disastrous. We compare things on the ground of their similarity, and similarity is not affected by distance. Radium is alike on the earth and in the sun ; it would be absurd to refuse to compare them on the ground that they are separated by many millions of miles. What would be thought of any other science which imposed on itself the restriction which some of our friends would inflict on anthropology ? Would

geology prosper if it confined its investigation, say, of sedimentary rocks to those of England and refused to compare those of Asia and America? How would zoology fare if the zoologist were forbidden to compare the animals of his own country with the animals of distant countries? the dogs, say, of Wales with the dogs of Africa and Australia? The futility, nay, the inherent absurdity, of the proposed restriction is so manifest that simply to state the proposal explicitly should suffice to expose it. Disguised in the fallacious form of a prudent precept, the nostrum is commonly administered to the sufferer with a trite tag from Dr. Johnson about surveying mankind from China to Peru, as if the mere idea of instituting such a survey were too preposterous for serious consideration. Yet the same men who level this taunt at anthropology would not dream of directing a similar gibe at the sciences of geology, botany, and zoology, in which the comparisons are world-wide.

IV

THE STUDY OF THE HUMAN MIND[1]

Mais même en laissant de côté le corps humain, la question de l'esprit humain reste d'une complexité énorme. Contemplons cet esprit, non pas seulement en lui-même, mais en toutes ses manifestations extérieures, je veux dire en tout ce qu'il a créé d'arts, de sciences, d'institutions sociales, politiques, religieuses. Et souvenons-nous que pendant des siècles innombrables ces arts, ces sciences, ces institutions ont varié

[1] *The Gorgon's Head and other Literary Pieces*, "Sur l'Étude des Origines humaines," pp. 340-342.

presque à l'infini selon les diversités des races, des temps, des lieux. Ainsi regardée l'étude de l'esprit humain devient d'une complexité effrayante. Comment l'aborder ? Comment l'esprit humain peut-il se comprendre ? Comment est-il en état d'expliquer toutes ses créations, si multiples, si variées, si diverses ?

On explique une chose en l'analysant, c'est-à-dire, en la décomposant en ses éléments simples, et en évaluant les forces qui ont rapproché et réuni ces éléments, les emboîtant les uns dans les autres de façon à en faire un ensemble cohérent et harmonieux. Donc, pour l'étude de l'esprit humain et de ses œuvres, la question se pose : comment trouver les éléments et évaluer les forces dont cet ensemble si complexe est formé ? Comment découvrir la pensée humaine dans sa plus grande simplicité ?

La réponse à cette question est fournie par la théorie de l'évolution organique. D'après cette théorie, chaque organisme, soit animal, soit végétal, a été produit par une évolution séculaire qui remonte, sans interruption, aux premiers débuts de la vie sur notre planète, et qui consiste dans une longue série de transformations progressives, de telle sorte qu'à chaque étape l'être vivant devient un peu moins simple et un peu plus complexe. D'où il suit que pour comprendre la nature de n'importe quel organisme il faut chercher son origine dans le passé le plus reculé et suivre l'histoire de son évolution depuis ce premier moment jusqu'à nos jours. A cette règle l'homme ne fait pas exception. Pour le connaître parfaitement il faudrait étudier l'histoire de son espèce dès le commencement : il faudrait tracer son évolution à la fois corporelle et mentale depuis ses origines les plus humbles jusqu'aux hauteurs les plus fastueuses qu'il se pique d'avoir

atteintes. En un mot, pour savoir ce qu'est l'homme, il faut connaître son origine.

Mais on m'objectera qu'une connaissance parfaite de l'histoire de notre espèce dépasse les moyens dont nous disposons, et que si, sans une telle connaissance, la nature humaine reste incompréhensible, il faudra renoncer à l'espoir de jamais la comprendre. Hélas ! l'objection n'est que trop juste, mais elle porte non seulement sur l'étude de l'homme, mais sur l'étude de n'importe quel être, de n'importe quelle chose. Créatures imparfaites que nous sommes, la connaissance parfaite n'est pas à notre portée : il faut nous contenter de quelque chose qui s'accorde mieux avec la mesure de nos faibles facultés : il faut nous borner aux limites étroites que nous impose la nature : il faut nous guider par des lumières blafardes et incertaines dans les ténèbres de cet univers illimité où nous sommes égarés. Consolons-nous de notre ignorance par la pensée que nos descendants arriveront à résoudre beaucoup de problèmes qui pour nous restent des énigmes. Car il faut toujours se souvenir que l'évolution organique, comme la grande évolution cosmique, ne s'arrête pas à nous autres, homuncules de cette génération : elle poursuivra son cours grandiose pendant des siècles sans fin, créant des êtres toujours plus parfaits, doués de facultés plus capables que les nôtres de saisir et de comprendre la vérité.

V

DIVERSITY OF TYPES THE EFFECT AND CONDITION OF EVOLUTION [1]

Mais gardons-nous d'imaginer que le tableau ainsi retracé du développement de la culture humaine soit exact et complet. Il s'en faut de beaucoup. A part de nombreuses lacunes qu'on peut remarquer dans le tableau, où les étapes intermédiaires font défaut, il serait téméraire au plus haut degré de supposer que n'importe quel état d'une tribu sauvage vivante correspond, trait pour trait, à une étape autrefois parcourue par les ancêtres des races civilisées. Supposer une telle chose ce serait se faire une idée très fausse du procédé de l'évolution : ce serait imaginer que l'évolution suit partout le même cours et qu'elle ne diffère qu'en degrés de rapidité dans les différentes races humaines. D'une telle supposition il suivrait que, laissées à elles-mêmes, toutes les races humaines arriveraient au bout du compte exactement aux mêmes étages de culture ; que les nègres, par exemple, deviendraient des blancs ; qu'ils se donneraient des lois aussi sages que celles de Justinien ou du code Napoléon ; qu'ils façonneraient des statues aussi belles que celles de Phidias ou de Michel-Ange ; qu'ils écriraient des tragédies aussi émouvantes que celles de Shakespeare, et des comédies aussi spirituelles que celles de Molière ; et qu'ils créeraient une musique aussi ravissante que celle de Mozart. Non, Messieurs, la Nature n'est pas dépourvue d'imagination au point

[1] *The Gorgon's Head and other Literary Pieces*, "Sur l'Étude des Origines humaines," pp. 345-347.

d'être forcée de couler tous les hommes dans le même moule ; au contraire, elle crée une richesse prodigieuse de types divers, si bien qu'on peut se demander si jamais elle a produit deux individus de la même espèce absolument pareils. C'est justement cette diversité illimitée de types qui forme la condition préalable de l'évolution organique. Nous pouvons nous figurer cette force créatrice, si je peux l'appeler ainsi, comme un arbre dont les rameaux poussent de tous les côtés ; eh bien, ces rameaux se ressemblent sans être jamais tout à fait semblables les uns aux autres, et sans jamais se réunir dans un seul tronc pareil à celui dont tous sont sortis ; au contraire, plus ils se développent, plus ils s'éloignent les uns des autres. La même chose arrive au grand arbre de la vie : plus il crée de nouvelles espèces, et plus ces espèces continuent à se propager, plus elles divergent. Cependant cette loi de divergence toujours croissante ne s'applique pas si rigoureusement aux races humaines qu'aux diverses espèces d'animaux, parce que toutes les races humaines, ne formant qu'une espèce, peuvent se mêler et produire ainsi un type intermédiaire ; mais dans ce mélange, si je ne me trompe, les divers éléments persistent et peuvent reparaître dans des rejetons assez éloignés.

VI

A SCIENCE OF ORIGINS[1]

To sum up : the central problem of mental anthropology is to trace that evolution of the human mind which has accompanied the evolution of the

[1] "The Scope and Method of Mental Anthropology," *Science Progress*, No. 64, April 1922, p. 586.

human body from the earliest times. But as the later stages of that evolution have long been studied by older sciences, it is only fair that the new science should confine itself for the most part to those earlier stages of which the older sciences had hardly taken account. That is why anthropology is commonly, and on the whole rightly, regarded as a science of origins. It is because the question of human origins was till lately a sort of no-man's ground, untrodden by the foot of science but trampled by the hoofs of ignorance and superstition, that anthropology has come forward to reclaim this desert from the wild asses which roamed over it, and to turn it into a garden of knowledge. Her efforts have not been wholly in vain. Already the desert has begun to bear fruit and to blossom as the rose.

VII

THE SAVAGE AS A HUMAN DOCUMENT [1]

The savage is a human document, a record of man's efforts to raise himself above the level of the beast. It is only of late years that the full value of the document has been appreciated; indeed, many people are probably still of Dr. Johnson's opinion, who, pointing to the three large volumes of *Voyages to the South Seas* which had just come out, said: "Who will read them through? A man had better work his way before the mast than read them through; they will be eaten by rats and mice before they are read through. There can be little entertainment in such books; one set of savages is like another." But the world has learned a good deal since Dr. Johnson's day; and the records

[1] *The Scope of Social Anthropology*, pp. 172-174.

of savage life, which the sage of Bolt Court consigned without scruple to the rats and mice, have now their place among the most precious archives of humanity. Their fate has been like that of the Sibylline Books. They were neglected and despised when they might have been obtained complete; and now wise men would give more than a king's ransom for their miserably mutilated and imperfect remains. It is true that before our time civilized men often viewed savages with interest and described them intelligently, and some of their descriptions are still of great scientific value. For example, the discovery of America naturally excited in the minds of the European peoples an eager curiosity as to the inhabitants of the new world, which had burst upon their gaze, as if at the waving of a wizard's wand the curtain of the western sky had suddenly rolled up and disclosed scenes of glamour and enchantment. Accordingly some of the Spaniards who explored and conquered these realms of wonder have bequeathed to us accounts of the manners and customs of the Indians, which for accuracy and fullness of detail probably surpass any former records of an alien race. Such, for instance, is the great work of the Franciscan friar Sahagun on the natives of Mexico, and such the work of Garcilasso de la Vega, himself half an Inca, on the Incas of Peru. Again, the exploration of the Pacific in the eighteenth century, with its revelation of fairy-like islands scattered in profusion over a sea of eternal summer, drew the eyes and stirred the imagination of Europe; and to the curiosity thus raised in many minds, though not in Dr. Johnson's, we owe some precious descriptions of the islanders, who, in those days of sailing ships, appeared to dwell so remote from us that the poet

Cowper fancied their seas might never again be ploughed by English keels.

VIII

THE PASSING OF THE SAVAGE [1]

Our contemporaries of this and the rising generation appear to be hardly aware that we are witnessing the last act of a long drama, a tragedy and a comedy in one, which is being silently played, with no fanfare of trumpets or roll of drums, before our eyes on the stage of history. Whatever becomes of the savages, the curtain must soon descend on savagery for ever. Of late the pace of civilization has so quickened, its expansion has become so beyond example rapid, that many savage races, who only a hundred years ago still led their old life unknown and undisturbed in the depth of virgin forests or in remote islands of the sea, are now being rudely hustled out of existence or transformed into a pathetic burlesque of their conquerors. With their disappearance or transformation an element of quaintness, of picturesqueness, of variety will be gone from the world. Society will probably be happier on the whole, but it will be soberer in tone, greyer and more uniform in colouring. And as savagery recedes farther and farther into the past, it will become more and more an object of curiosity and wonder to generations parted from it by an impassable and ever-widening gulf of time. Its darker side will be forgotten, its brighter side will be remembered. Its cruelties, its hardships, its miseries will be slurred over; memory will dwell with delight on whatever

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i., Preface, pp. xiv-xv.

was good and beautiful, or may seem to have been good and beautiful, in the long-vanished life of the wilderness. Time, the magician, will cast his unfailing spell over these remote ages. An atmosphere of romance will gather round them, like the blue haze which softens into tender beauty the harsher features of a distant landscape. So the patriarchal age is invested for us with a perennial charm in the enchanting narratives of Genesis and the Odyssey, narratives which breathe the freshness of a summer morning and glister as with dewdrops in the first beams of the rising sun of history.

IX

THE PASSING OF THE SAVAGE: ENGLAND'S DUTY[1]

In the whole range of human knowledge at the present moment there is no more pressing need than that of recording this priceless evidence of man's early history before it is too late. For soon, very soon, the opportunities which we still enjoy will be gone for ever. In another quarter of a century probably there will be little or nothing of the old savage life left to record. The savage, such as we may still see him, will then be as extinct as the dodo. The sands are fast running out: the hour will soon strike: the record will be closed: the book will be sealed. And how shall we of this generation look when we stand at the bar of posterity arraigned on a charge of high treason to our race, we who neglected to study our perishing fellowmen, but who sent out costly expeditions to observe the stars and to explore the barren ice-bound regions of

[1] *The Scope of Social Anthropology*, pp. 175-176.

the poles, as if the polar ice would melt and the stars would cease to shine when we are gone? Let us awake from our slumber, let us light our lamps, let us gird up our loins. The Universities exist for the advancement of knowledge. It is their duty to add this new province to the ancient departments of learning which they cultivate so diligently. Cambridge, to its honour, has led the way in equipping and despatching anthropological expeditions; it is for Oxford, it is for Liverpool, it is for every University in the land to join in the work.

More than that, it is the public duty of every civilized State actively to co-operate. In this respect the United States of America, by instituting a bureau for the study of the aborigines within its dominions, has set an example which every enlightened nation that rules over lower races ought to imitate. On none does that duty, that responsibility, lie more clearly and more heavily than on our own, for to none in the whole course of human history has the sceptre been given over so many and so diverse races of men. We have made ourselves our brother's keepers. Woe to us if we neglect our duty to our brother! It is not enough for us to rule in justice the peoples we have subjugated by the sword. We owe it to them, we owe it to ourselves, we owe it to posterity, who will require it at our hands, that we should describe them as they were before we found them, before they ever saw the English flag and heard, for good or evil, the English tongue. The voice of England speaks to her subject peoples in other accents than in the thunder of her guns. Peace has its triumphs as well as war: there are nobler trophies than captured flags and cannons. There are monuments, airy monuments,

monuments of words, which seem so fleeting and evanescent, that will yet last when your cannons have crumbled and your flags have mouldered into dust. When the Roman poet wished to present an image of perpetuity, he said that he would be remembered so long as the Roman Empire endured, so long as the white-robed procession of the Vestals and Pontiffs should ascend the Capitol to pray in the temple of Jupiter. That solemn procession has long ceased to climb the slope of the Capitol, the Roman Empire itself has long passed away, like the empire of Alexander, like the empire of Charlemagne, like the empire of Spain, yet still amid the wreck of kingdoms the poet's monument stands firm, for still his verses are read and remembered. I appeal to the Universities, I appeal to the Government of this country to unite in building a monument, a beneficent monument, of the British Empire, a monument

> "*Quod non imber edax, non Aquilo impotens*
> *Possit diruere, aut innumerabilis*
> *Annorum series, et fuga temporum*"

X

SIBYLLINE LEAVES[1]

Everywhere the savages are dying out, and as they go they take with them page after page of the most ancient history of our race. The study of savage man may be compared to the Sibyl, who, as she threw away leaf after leaf, still demanded the same price for the ever-diminishing number that remained. Our chances of preserving for future generations a record

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i. p. 95.

of these tribes—the beaten and dying runners in life's race—are lessening year by year, enhancing rather than diminishing, as they drop away, the value of the few trustworthy records we have secured. For there is this difference between the Sibyl of Cumae and the Sibyl of anthropology: the revelation promised by the former was not lost for ever with the fluttering leaves—the future will in time reveal itself to the future; but who shall read in ages to come the vanished record of the past?

XI

CIVILIZATION EVOLVED OUT OF SAVAGERY[1]

The sphere of Social Anthropology as I understand it, or at least as I propose to treat it, is limited to the crude beginnings, the rudimentary development of human society: it does not include the maturer phases of that complex growth, still less does it embrace the practical problems with which our modern statesmen and lawgivers are called upon to deal. The study might accordingly be described as the embryology of human thought and institutions, or, to be more precise, as that inquiry which seeks to ascertain, first, the beliefs and customs of savages, and, second, the relics of these beliefs and customs which have survived like fossils among peoples of higher culture. In this description of the sphere of Social Anthropology it is implied that the ancestors of the civilized nations were once savages, and that they have transmitted, or may have transmitted, to their more cultured descendants ideas and institutions which, however

[1] *The Scope of Social Anthropology*, pp. 161-163.

incongruous with their later surroundings, were perfectly in keeping with the modes of thought and action of the ruder society in which they originated. In short, the definition assumes that civilization has always and everywhere been evolved out of savagery. The mass of evidence on which this assumption rests is in my opinion so great as to render the induction incontrovertible. At least, if any one disputes it I do not think it worth while to argue with him. There are still, I believe, in civilized society people who hold that the earth is flat and that the sun goes round it; but no sensible man will waste time in the vain attempt to convince such persons of their error, even though these flatteners of the earth and circulators of the sun appeal with perfect justice to the evidence of their senses in support of their hallucination, which is more than the opponents of man's primitive savagery are able to do.

Thus the study of savage life is a very important part of Social Anthropology. For by comparison with civilized man the savage represents an arrested or rather retarded stage of social development, and an examination of his customs and beliefs accordingly supplies the same sort of evidence of the evolution of the human mind that an examination of the embryo supplies of the evolution of the human body. To put it otherwise, a savage is to a civilized man as a child is to an adult; and just as the gradual growth of intelligence in a child corresponds to, and in a sense recapitulates, the gradual growth of intelligence in the species, so a study of savage society at various stages of evolution enables us to follow approximately, though of course not exactly, the road by which the ancestors of the higher races must have travelled in

their progress upward through barbarism to civilization. In short, savagery is the primitive condition of mankind, and if we would understand what primitive man was we must know what the savage now is.

XII

A SCALE OF MENTAL EVOLUTION[1]

Thus from an examination, first, of savagery and, second, of its survivals in civilization, the study of Social Anthropology attempts to trace the early history of human thought and institutions. The history can never be complete, unless science should discover some mode of reading the faded record of the past of which we in this generation can hardly dream. We know indeed that every event, however insignificant, implies a change, however slight, in the material constitution of the universe, so that the whole history of the world is, in a sense, engraved upon its face, though our eyes are too dim to read the scroll. It may be that in the future some wondrous reagent, some magic chemical, may yet be found to bring out the whole of nature's secret hand-writing for a greater than Daniel to interpret to his fellows. That will hardly be in our time. With the resources at present at our command we must be content with a very brief, imperfect, and in large measure conjectural account of man's mental and social development in prehistoric ages. As I have already pointed out, the evidence, fragmentary and dubious as it is, only runs back a very little way into the measureless past of human life on earth ; we soon lose the thread,

[1] *The Scope of Social Anthropology*, pp. 171-172.

the faintly glimmering thread, in the thick darkness of the absolutely unknown. Even in the comparatively short space of time, a few thousand years at most, which falls more or less within our ken, there are many deep and wide chasms which can only be bridged by hypotheses, if the story of evolution is to run continuously. Such bridges are built in anthropology as in biology by the Comparative Method, which enables us to borrow the links of one chain of evidence to supply the gaps in another. For us who deal, not with the various forms of animal life, but with the various products of human intelligence, the legitimacy of the Comparative Method rests on the well-ascertained similarity of the working of the human mind in all races of men. I have laid stress on the great inequalities which exist not only between the various races, but between men of the same race and generation; but it should be clearly understood and remembered that these divergencies are quantitative rather than qualitative, they consist in differences of degree rather than of kind. The savage is not a different sort of being from his civilized brother: he has the same capacities, mental and moral, but they are less fully developed: his evolution has been arrested, or rather retarded, at a lower level. And as savage races are not all on the same plane, but have stopped or tarried at different points of the upward path, we can to a certain extent, by comparing them with each other, construct a scale of social progression and mark out roughly some of the stages on the long road that leads from savagery to civilization. In the kingdom of mind such a scale of mental evolution answers to the scale of morphological evolution in the animal kingdom.

XIII

THE SCIENTIFIC SPIRIT[1]

Anthropology, or the study of man, claims a place for itself among the sciences. Of that study or science the history of institutions, with which we are here concerned, forms an important branch. It aims at tracing the growth, development, and decay of all human institutions from the earliest to the latest times, not merely recording the facts in chronological order, but referring them to their general causes in the physical and mental constitution of man and the influence of external nature. Now, if we are to pursue this study in a scientific spirit, we must endeavour to investigate the beliefs and customs of mankind with the same rigorous impartiality with which, for example, the zoologist investigates the habits of bees and ants. To attain that impartiality is indeed much harder for the anthropologist than for the zoologist, for the customs and superstitions even of the lowest savages touch us far more nearly than the habits even of the highest animals. The continuity of human development has been such that most, if not all, of the great institutions which still form the framework of civilized society have their roots in savagery, and have been handed down to us in these later days through countless generations, assuming new outward forms in the process of transmission, but remaining in their inmost core substantially unchanged. Such, for example, to take a

[1] *The Magical Origin of Kings* (*Lectures on the Early History of the Kingship*), pp. 2-4.

few conspicuous instances, are the institution of private property, the institution of marriage, the institution of war, and the worship of a god. Differences of opinion may exist, and have existed, as to the precise value of the inheritance; as to the fact of it there can be none. Thus in treating even of the rudest savages it is not easy, if I may say so, to keep our eyes fixed inflexibly on the object immediately before us. For we seem to be standing at the sources of human history, and it is difficult to exclude from our mind the thought of the momentous consequences which in other ages and other lands have flowed from these simple beginnings, often from these apparently harmless absurdities. And the farther we descend the stream of history, and the nearer we approach to our own age and country, the harder it becomes to maintain an impartial attitude in the investigation of institutions which have been fraught with so much happiness and so much misery for mankind. Yet, if we are to succeed in the inquiry, we must endeavour to approach it without prejudice and to pursue it without passion, bearing in mind that our aim is simply the ascertainment of truth, not the apportionment of praise or blame; that we are not judges, still less advocates, but merely inquirers; that it is for us, in the language of Spinoza, *humanas actiones non ridere, non lugere, neque detestari, sed intelligere.*[1]

[1] Spinoza, *Tractatus Politicus*, i. 4: "*Cum igitur animum ad Politicam applicuerim, nihil quod novum vel inauditum est, sed tantum ea, quae cum praxi optime conveniunt, certa et indubitata ratione demonstrare, aut ex ipsa humanae naturae conditione deducere intendi; et ut ea, quae ad hanc scientiam spectant, eadem animi libertate, qua res Mathematicas solemus, inquirerem, sedulo curavi, humanas actiones non ridere, non lugere, neque detestari, sed intelligere.*"

XIV

THE INDUCTIVE METHOD[1]

A science which rests on observation, as all the historical sciences necessarily do, may be taught in one of two ways. Either we may begin with a statement of general principles and then proceed to illustrate it by individual cases; or, on the contrary, we may begin with the individual cases and from a comparison of them with each other may endeavour to elicit those general laws which, in common parlance, are said to govern the particulars. The former is the deductive method, the latter is the inductive.

Both methods have, like most other things, their respective advantages and disadvantages. The deductive method is, in appearance at least, the more scientific. There is an air of completeness, symmetry, and precision about it which is very taking. It gives us a bird's-eye view of a subject which is easily grasped by the mind and retained by the memory. It is thus admirably adapted for exposition on the side of the teacher, and for learning on the side of the pupil. In other words, it is the best mode of imparting and acquiring information, whether for the sake of examinations or for higher ends. For such purposes the inductive method is nearly useless. It plunges us at once into such a sea of particulars that it is difficult at first to find our bearings, that is, to perceive the general principles which are to reduce this seeming chaos to order. To adopt a common and expressive phrase, it is hard to see the wood for the trees. Yet the serious disadvantage under which the inductive

[1] *The Magical Origin of Kings*, pp. 4-8.

method thus labours is perhaps more than compensated in another direction by one solid advantage—it is the method of discovery. In all sciences which rest on observation, discovery must ultimately proceed from the particular to the general, from the isolated observed instances to the abstract conception which binds them together. Apparent exceptions there are, but on examination they will always, I believe, be found to conform to the rule. Thus if the inductive method is unsuited to the acquisition, it is well suited to the extension, of knowledge ; if it does not train a student for examinations, it trains him for research.

Apart from this general advantage possessed by the inductive method, there is a special reason why anthropology should adhere to it at the present time. In order to make a sound induction large collections of facts are necessary ; hence in the inductive sciences it is essential that a period of collection should precede a period of generalization. Not until great masses of observations have been accumulated and classified do the general laws which pervade them begin to appear on the surface. Now anthropology in general and the history of institutions in particular are still in the collecting stage. The prime want of the study is not so much theories as facts. This is especially true of that branch of the study which treats of origins ; for, as I have said, most great institutions may be traced back to savagery, and consequently for the early history of mankind the savage is our most precious document. It is only of late years that the document has received the attention it deserves ; and unfortunately it is perishing under our eyes. Contact with civilization is rapidly effacing the old beliefs and customs of the savage, and is thereby obliterating

records of priceless value for the history of our race. The most urgent need of anthropology at present is to procure accurate accounts of the existing customs and ideas of savages before they have disappeared. When these have been obtained, when the records existing in our libraries have been fully scrutinized, and when the whole body of information has been classified and digested, the philosophic historian will be able to formulate, with a fair degree of probability, those general laws which have shaped the intellectual, social, and moral evolution of mankind.

That will not be done in our day. The great thinkers, the Newtons and Darwins of anthropology, will come after us. It is our business to prepare for them by collecting, sifting, and arranging the records in order that when, in the fullness of time, the master-mind shall arise and survey them, he may be able to detect at once that unity in multiplicity, that universal in the particulars, which has escaped us. The duty at present incumbent on the investigator is therefore to rake together the facts, whether, like some of my friends, he goes for them at the peril of his life to savage lands, or merely unearths them at his ease from the dust of libraries. The time has gone by when dreamers like Rousseau could reconstruct the history of society out of their own minds, and their dreams could be accepted as visions of a golden age to come, their voices listened to like angel trumpets heralding the advent of a new heaven and a new earth. It is not for the anthropologist of to-day to blow these high notes, to build these gay castles in the clouds. His task is the soberer, duller one of laying, in the patient accumulation of facts, the foundations of a structure more solid and enduring than the glittering fantasies

of Rousseau's dream. Yet he too may prove in the end to be a pioneer of revolution, a revolution all the surer and more lasting because it will be slow and peaceful.

Thus the method of anthropology is induction, and at present its students are engaged in compiling and arranging their materials rather than in evolving general theories out of them. Yet a certain amount of preliminary generalization is legitimate and indeed necessary. The work even of observation can hardly be accomplished without some intermixture of theory to direct the observer's attention to points which he might otherwise overlook or regard as too insignificant to be worthy of record. But these provisional hypotheses should be held very loosely; we must always be ready to modify or discard them when they are found to conflict with fresh evidence. The advance of knowledge in this, as in every other field, consists in a progressive readjustment of theory to fact, of conception to perception, of thought to experience; and as that readjustment, though more and more exact, can never be perfect, the advance is infinite.

XV

THE OSCILLATIONS OF THE SOCIAL PENDULUM [1]

About the social condition of primaeval man we know absolutely nothing, and it is vain to speculate. Our first parents may have been as strict monogamists as Whiston or Dr. Primrose, or they may have been just the reverse. We have no information

[1] *The Scope of Social Anthropology*, pp. 165-166.

on the subject, and are never likely to get any. In the countless ages which have elapsed since man and woman first roamed the happy garden hand in hand or jabbered like apes among the leafy boughs of the virgin forest, their relations to each other may have undergone innumerable changes. For human affairs, like the courses of the heaven, seem to run in cycles: the social pendulum swings to and fro from one extremity of the scale to the other: in the political sphere it has swung from democracy to despotism, and back again from despotism to democracy; and so in the domestic sphere it may have oscillated many a time between libertinism and monogamy.

XVI

THE MIRAGE OF A GOLDEN AGE[1]

By some strange witchery, some freak of the fairy imagination, who plays us so many tricks, man perpetually conjures up for himself the mirage of a Golden Age in the far past or the far future, dreaming of a bliss that never was and may never be. So far as the past is concerned, it is the sad duty of anthropology to break that dream, to dispel that mirage, to paint savagery in its true colours. I have attempted to do so in this book. I have extenuated nothing, I have softened nothing, and I hope I have exaggerated nothing. As a plain record of a curious form of society which must soon be numbered with the past, the book may continue to possess an interest even when, with the progress of knowledge, its errors shall have been corrected and its theories perhaps super-

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i., Preface, pp. xv-xvi.

seded by others which make a nearer approach to truth. For though I have never hesitated either to frame theories which seemed to fit the facts or to throw them away when they ceased to do so, my aim in this and my other writings has not been to blow bubble hypotheses which glitter for a moment and are gone; it has been by a wide collection and an exact classification of facts to lay a broad and solid foundation for the inductive study of primitive man.

XVII

THE CLASH OF CULTURES[1]

The old view that savages have degenerated from a higher level of culture, on which their forefathers once stood, is destitute alike of evidence and of probability. On the contrary, the information which we possess as to the lower races, meagre and fragmentary as it unfortunately is, all seems to point to the conclusion that on the whole even the most savage tribes have reached their low level of culture from one still lower, and that the upward movement, though so slow as to be almost imperceptible, has yet been real and steady up to the point where savagery has come into contact with civilization. The moment of such contact is a critical one for the savages. If the intellectual, moral, and social interval which divides them from the civilized intruders exceeds a certain degree, then it appears that sooner or later the savages must inevitably perish; the shock of collision with a stronger race is too violent to be withstood, the weaker goes to the wall and is shattered. But if on the other hand the breach

[1] *The Belief in Immortality*, vol. i. pp. 88-89.

between the two conflicting races is not so wide as to be impassable, there is a hope that the weaker may assimilate enough of the higher culture of the other to survive. It was so, for example, with our barbarous forefathers in contact with the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome; and it may be so in future with some, for example, of the black races of the present day in contact with European civilization. Time will show.

XVIII

THE HUMAN COMEDY [1]

Man is a very curious animal, and the more we know of his habits the more curious does he appear. He may be the most rational of the beasts, but certainly he is the most absurd. Even the saturnine wit of Swift, unaided by a knowledge of savages, fell far short of the reality in his attempt to set human folly in a strong light. Yet the odd thing is that in spite, or perhaps by virtue, of his absurdities man moves steadily upwards; the more we learn of his past history the more groundless does the old theory of his degeneracy prove to be. From false premises he often arrives at sound conclusions: from a chimerical theory he deduces a salutary practice. This discourse will have served a useful purpose if it illustrates a few of the ways in which folly mysteriously deviates into wisdom, and good comes out of evil. It is a mere sketch of a vast subject. Whether I shall ever fill in these bald outlines with finer strokes and deeper shadows must be left to the future to determine. The materials for such a picture exist in abundance; and

[1] *Psyche's Task*[2], Preface, pp. vii-viii.

if the colours are dark, they are yet illuminated, as I have tried in this essay to point out, by a ray of consolation and hope.

XIX

ACTION THE TOUCHSTONE OF BELIEF[1]

The thought of the savage is apt to be vague and inconsistent; he neither represents his ideas clearly to his own mind nor can he express them lucidly to others, even if he wishes to do so. And his thought is not only vague and inconsistent; it is fluid and unstable, liable to shift and change under alien influence. For these and other reasons, such as the distrust of strangers and the difficulty of language, which often interposes a formidable barrier between savage man and the civilized inquirer, the domain of primitive beliefs is beset by so many snares and pitfalls that we might almost despair of arriving at the truth, were it not that we possess a clue to guide us on the dark and slippery way. That clue is action. While it is generally very difficult to ascertain what any man thinks, it is comparatively easy to ascertain what he does; and what a man does, not what he says, is the surest touchstone to his real belief. Hence when we attempt to study the religion of backward races, the ritual which they practise is generally a safer indication of their actual creed than the loudest profession of faith.

[1] *The Belief in Immortality*, vol. i. p. 143.

XX

THE RATIONALITY OF THE SAVAGE[1]

I think we may lay it down as a well-established truth that savages in general, so far as they are known to us, have certain more or less definite theories, whether we call them religious or philosophical, by which they regulate their conduct, and judged by which their acts, however absurd they may seem to the civilized man, are really both rational and intelligible. Hence it is, in my opinion, a profound mistake hastily to conclude that because the behaviour of the savage does not agree with our notions of what is reasonable, natural, and proper, it must therefore necessarily be illogical, the result of blind impulse rather than of deliberate thought and calculation. No doubt the savage, like the civilized man, does often act purely on impulse; his passions overmaster his reason, and sweep it away before them. He is probably indeed much more impulsive, much more liable to be whirled about by gusts of emotion than we are; yet it would be unfair to judge his life as a whole by these occasional outbursts rather than by its general tenour, which to those who know him from long observation reveals a groundwork of logic and reason resembling our own in its operations, though differing from ours in the premises from which it sets out. I think it desirable to emphasize the rational basis of savage life because it has been the fashion of late years with some writers to question or rather deny it. According to them, if I understand them aright, the savage acts first and

[1] *The Belief in Immortality*, vol. i. pp. 265-266.

invents his reasons, generally very absurd reasons, for so doing afterwards. Significantly enough, the writers who argue in favour of the essential irrationality of savage conduct have none of them, I believe, any personal acquaintance with savages. Their conclusions are based not on observation but on purely theoretical deductions, a most precarious foundation on which to erect a science of man or indeed of anything. As such, they cannot be weighed in the balance against the positive testimony of many witnesses who have lived for years with the savage and affirm emphatically the logical basis which underlies and explains his seeming vagaries. At all events I for one have no hesitation in accepting the evidence of such men to matters of fact with which they are acquainted, and I unhesitatingly reject all theories which directly contradict that evidence. If there ever has been any race of men who invariably acted first and thought afterwards, I can only say that in the course of my reading and observation I have never met with any trace of them, and I am apt to suppose that, if they ever existed anywhere but in the imagination of bookish dreamers, their career must have been an exceedingly short one, since in the struggle for existence they would surely succumb to adversaries who tempered and directed the blind fury of combat with at least a modicum of reason and sense. The myth of the illogical or prelogical savage may safely be relegated to that museum of learned absurdities and abortions which speculative anthropology is constantly enriching with fresh specimens of misapplied ingenuity and wasted industry.

XXI

EXISTING SAVAGES NOT ABSOLUTELY PRIMITIVE [1]

But here it is necessary to guard against a common misapprehension. The savages of to-day are primitive only in a relative, not in an absolute sense. They are primitive by comparison with us; but they are not primitive by comparison with truly primaeval man, that is, with man as he was when he first emerged from the purely bestial stage of existence. Indeed, compared with man in his absolutely pristine state even the lowest savage of to-day is doubtless a highly developed and cultured being, since all evidence and all probability are in favour of the view that every existing race of men, the rudest as well as the most civilized, has reached its present level of culture, whether it be high or low, only after a slow and painful progress upwards, which must have extended over many thousands, perhaps millions, of years. Therefore when we speak of any known savages as primitive, which the usage of the English language permits us to do, it should always be remembered that we apply the term primitive to them in a relative, not in an absolute sense. What we mean is that their culture is rudimentary compared with that of the civilized nations, but not by any means that it is identical with that of primaeval man. It is necessary to emphasize this relative use of the term primitive in its application to all known savages without exception, because the ambiguity arising from the double

[1] *The Scope of Social Anthropology*, pp. 163-164.

meaning of the word has been the source of much confusion and misunderstanding. Careless or unscrupulous writers have made great play with it for purposes of controversy, using the word now in the one sense and now in the other as it suited their argument at the moment, without perceiving, or at all events without indicating, the equivocation. In order to avoid these verbal fallacies it is only necessary to bear steadily in mind that while Social Anthropology has much to say of primitive man in the relative sense, it has nothing whatever to say about primitive man in the absolute sense, and that for the very simple reason that it knows nothing whatever about him, and, so far as we can see at present, is never likely to know anything. To construct a history of human society by starting from absolutely primordial man and working down through thousands or millions of years to the institutions of existing savages might possibly have merits as a flight of imagination, but it could have none as a work of science. To do this would be exactly to reverse the proper mode of scientific procedure. It would be to work *a priori* from the unknown to the known instead of *a posteriori* from the known to the unknown. For we do know a good deal about the social state of the savages of to-day and yesterday, but we know nothing whatever, I repeat, about absolutely primitive human society. Hence a sober inquirer who seeks to elucidate the social evolution of mankind in ages before the dawn of history must start, not from an unknown and purely hypothetical primaeval man, but from the lowest savages whom we know or possess adequate records of; and from their customs, beliefs, and traditions as a solid basis of fact he may work back a little way

hypothetically through the obscurity of the past; that is, he may form a reasonable theory of the way in which these actual customs, beliefs, and traditions have grown up and developed in a period more or less remote, but probably not very remote, from the one in which they have been observed and recorded. But if, as I assume, he is a sober inquirer, he will never expect to carry back this reconstruction of human history very far, still less will he dream of linking it up with the very beginning, because he is aware that we possess no evidence which would enable us to bridge even hypothetically the gulf of thousands or millions of years which divides the savage of to-day from primaeval man.

XXII

THE LOWLY NOT NECESSARILY DEGRADED [1]

Lowness in the scale of humanity is sometimes confounded with degradation, with which it has no necessary connexion. Similarly in the animal creation the ant, the bee, the elephant, and the dog are low in the scale by comparison with man, but they are not degraded, and it would be a calumny to describe them as stupid, lazy, brutal, and so on; for many of these creatures display a degree of intelligence and industry, of courage and affection, which should put many men to shame.

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i. p. 342.

XXIII

THE MEANING OF FOLK-LORE[1]

Modern researches into the early history of man, conducted on different lines, have converged with almost irresistible force on the conclusion, that all civilized races have at some period or other emerged from a state of savagery resembling more or less closely the state in which many backward races have continued to the present time; and that, long after the majority of men in a community have ceased to think and act like savages, not a few traces of the old ruder modes of life and thought survive in the habits and institutions of the people. Such survivals are included under the head of folk-lore, which, in the broadest sense of the word, may be said to embrace the whole body of a people's traditionary beliefs and customs, so far as these appear to be due to the collective action of the multitude and cannot be traced to the individual influence of great men. Despite the high moral and religious development of the ancient Hebrews, there is no reason to suppose that they formed an exception to this general law. They, too, had probably passed through a stage of barbarism and even of savagery; and this probability, based on the analogy of other races, is confirmed by an examination of their literature, which contains many references to beliefs and practices that can hardly be explained except on the supposition that they are rudimentary survivals from a far lower level of culture.

[1] *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, vol. i., Preface, p. vii.

XXIV

FOLK-LORE AND POETRY [1]

The folk-lore of scents has yet to be studied. In investigating it, as every other branch of folk-lore, the student may learn much from the poets, who perceive by intuition what most of us have to learn by a laborious collection of facts. Indeed, without some touch of poetic fancy, it is hardly possible to enter into the heart of the people. A frigid rationalist will knock in vain at the magic rose-wreathed portal of fairy-land. The porter will not open to Mr. Gradgrind.

XXV

THE BACKWARDNESS OF ABORIGINAL MAN IN AUSTRALIA [2]

Among the great land masses or continents of the world Australia is at once the smallest and the most isolated, and hence its plants and animals are in general of a less developed and more archaic type than those of the other continents. For the same reason aboriginal man has remained on the whole, down to the present day, in a more primitive state in Australia than elsewhere. In the struggle for existence progress depends mainly on competition: the more numerous the competitors the fiercer is the struggle, and the more rapid, consequently, is evolution. The comparatively small area of Australia, combined with

[1] *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, vol. ii. p. 516.
[2] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i. pp. 92-93.

its physical features — notably the arid and desert nature of a large part of the country—has always restricted population, and by restricting population has retarded progress. This holds true above all of the central region, which is not only cut off from the outer world by its position, but is also isolated by natural barriers from the rest of the continent. Here, then, in the secluded heart of the most secluded continent the scientific inquirer might reasonably expect to find the savage in his very lowest depths, to detect humanity in the chrysalis stage, to mark the first blind gropings of our race after freedom and light.

XXVI

THE TIDE OF PROGRESS SETTING FROM THE SEA [1]

The interior of a country is naturally less open to foreign influence than its coasts, and is therefore more tenacious of old ways. But quite apart from any foreign influence, which before the coming of Europeans seems hardly to have affected the Australian race, there is a special cause why the coastal tribes of Australia should take the first steps towards civilization, and that is the greater abundance of water and food in their country as compared with the parched and barren tablelands of the interior. Central Australia lies in the desert zone of the southern hemisphere, and has no high mountains to intercept and condense the vapours from the surrounding ocean. The most extensive tract of fertile and well-watered country is on the east and south-east, where a fine range of mountains

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i. pp. 167-169.

approaches, in the colony of Victoria, the limits of perpetual snow. And in the north, on the shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria, a heavier rainfall produces a more abundant vegetation and a more plentiful supply of food than can be found in the arid wilderness of the interior. Thus, even among the rude savages of Australia, we can detect the operation of those natural laws which have ordained that elsewhere all the great civilizations of the world should arise in well-watered and fertile lands within the atmospheric influence of the sea. An abundant supply of good food stimulates progress in more ways than one. By leaving men with leisure on their hands it affords them greater opportunities for observation and thought than are enjoyed by people whose whole energies are absorbed in an ardous struggle for a bare subsistence; and by improving the physical stamina of the race it strengthens and sharpens the intellectual faculties, which, in the long run, are always depressed and impaired by a poor and meagre diet. Thus, if in Australia the tide of progress, slow but perceptible, has set from the sea towards the interior, it has probably been in large measure under the impulse of a more plentiful supply of food, which in its turn is due to the heavier rainfall on the coast and the neighbouring regions.

XXVII

MATERIAL PROGRESS THE MEASURE OF INTELLECTUAL ADVANCE [1]

It is natural and perhaps inevitable that man's earliest efforts to ameliorate his lot should be directed

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i. pp. 325-326.

towards the satisfaction of his physical wants, since the material side of his nature is the indispensable basis on which, in a material world, his intellectual and moral being must rest. But material progress in the arts and comforts of life is at the same time a sure sign of intellectual progress, since every implement, from the rudest club of the lowest savage to the most complex and delicate machine of modern science, is nothing but the physical embodiment of an idea which preceded it in the mind of man. Hence in the evolution of culture, mental improvement is the prime factor, the moving cause ; material improvement is secondary, it follows the other as its effect. It would be well if the shallow rhetoricians who rail at the advance of mechanical science in our own age could apprehend this truth. They would then see that in arraigning what they do not understand they are really arraigning that upward movement in the mind of man which, though we know neither its origin nor its goal, is yet the source of all that is best and noblest in human nature.

From these considerations it follows that a people's progress in the material arts is not only the most obvious but on the whole the surest measure of its intellectual and social progress. The highest types of human intellect and character are never found among naked, houseless, artless savages ; they are only found in countries and in ages which have attained to the highest pitch of material civilization, which have carried the arts and crafts to their greatest perfection. It is in towns, not in the wilderness, that the fairest flowers of humanity have bloomed. True civilization begins, as the very name suggests, with the foundation of cities. Where no such ganglia

of concentrated energy exist, the population is savage or barbarous.

XXVIII

EVOLUTION AND DIFFUSION OF CULTURE[1]

The record of man's mental development is even more imperfect than the record of his physical development, and it is harder to read, not only by reason of the incomparably more subtle and complex nature of the subject, but because the reader's eyes are apt to be dimmed by thick mists of passion and prejudice, which cloud in a far less degree the fields of comparative anatomy and geology. My contribution to the history of the human mind consists of little more than a rough and purely provisional classification of facts gathered almost entirely from printed sources. If there is one general conclusion which seems to emerge from the mass of particulars, I venture to think that it is the essential similarity in the working of the less developed human mind among all races, which corresponds to the essential similarity in their bodily frame revealed by comparative anatomy. But while this general mental similarity may, I believe, be taken as established, we must always be on our guard against tracing to it a multitude of particular resemblances which may be and often are due to simple diffusion, since nothing is more certain than that the various races of men have borrowed from each other many of their arts and crafts, their ideas, customs, and institutions. To sift out the elements of culture which a race has independently

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part VII. *Balder the Beautiful*, vol. i., Preface, pp. vi-vii.

evolved and to distinguish them accurately from those which it has derived from other races is a task of extreme difficulty and delicacy, which promises to occupy students of man for a long time to come; indeed, so complex are the facts and so imperfect in most cases is the historical record that it may be doubted whether in regard to many of the lower races we shall ever arrive at more than probable conjectures.

XXIX

SIMILARITIES OF CUSTOM, AND THEIR ORIGIN [1]

How are we to explain the numerous and striking similarities which obtain between the beliefs and customs of races inhabiting distant parts of the world? Are such resemblances due to the transmission of the customs and beliefs from one race to another, either by immediate contact or through the medium of intervening peoples? Or have they arisen independently in many different races through the similar working of the human mind under similar circumstances? Now, if I may presume to offer an opinion on this much-debated problem, I would say at once that, put in the form of an antithesis between mutually exclusive views, the question seems to me absurd. So far as I can judge, all experience and all probability are in favour of the conclusion, that both causes have operated extensively and powerfully to produce the observed similarities of custom and belief among the various races of mankind: in other words, many of these resemblances are to be explained by simple

[1] *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, vol. i. pp. 106-107.

transmission, with more or less of modification, from people to people, and many are to be explained as having originated independently through the similar action of the human mind in response to similar environment. If that is so—and I confess to thinking that this is the only reasonable and probable view—it will follow that in attempting to account for any particular case of resemblance which may be traced between the customs and beliefs of different races, it would be futile to appeal to the general principle either of transmission or of independent origin ; each case must be judged on its own merits after an impartial scrutiny of the facts and referred to the one or the other principle, or possibly to a combination of the two, according as the balance of evidence inclines to the one side or to the other, or hangs evenly between them.

This general conclusion, which accepts the two principles of transmission and independent origin as both of them true and valid within certain limits, is confirmed by the particular investigation of diluvial traditions. For it is certain that legends of a great flood are found dispersed among many diverse peoples in distant regions of the earth, and so far as demonstration in such matters is possible, it can be demonstrated that the similarities which undoubtedly exist between many of these legends are due partly to direct transmission from one people to another, and partly to similar, but quite independent, experiences either of great floods or of phenomena which suggested the occurrence of great floods, in many different parts of the world. Thus the study of these traditions, quite apart from any conclusions to which it may lead us concerning their historical credibility, may

serve a useful purpose if it mitigates the heat with which the controversy has sometimes been carried on, by convincing the extreme partisans of both principles that in this as in so many other disputes the truth lies wholly neither on the one side nor on the other, but somewhere between the two.

XXX

THE QUESTION OF SINGLE OR MULTIPLE ORIGINS [1]

Ayant terminé ce bref exposé des considérations générales qui m'ont porté depuis longtemps vers l'étude de nos sauvages, je demanderai la permission de vous entretenir quelques minutes sur un problème d'origine dont quelques savants chez nous se sont beaucoup occupés durant ces dernières années : je veux dire la question de l'origine unique ou multiple des idées, des arts, et des institutions. Il s'agit d'expliquer les grandes ressemblances d'idées, d'arts, et d'institutions qui se font remarquer parmi les tribus sauvages, même les plus diverses et les plus éloignées de par le monde. On se demande si ces ressemblances viennent de ce que l'esprit humain se ressemble partout, et par conséquent qu'il produit partout des idées, des arts, des institutions semblables, comme des machines faites d'après le même modèle fabriquent des produits semblables ; ou bien si ces ressemblances proviennent de ce que les gens s'empruntent leurs idées, leurs arts, leurs institutions les uns aux autres, de sorte que si l'on pouvait tracer l'histoire de toutes

[1] *The Gorgon's Head and other Literary Pieces*, "Sur l'Étude des Origines humaines," pp. 348-355.

ces idées, de tous ces arts, et de toutes ces institutions jusqu'à leur source, on trouverait que chacune d'elles n'a tiré son origine que d'un seul cerveau humain, d'où elle s'est répandue en des cercles toujours croissants de par le monde. En un mot, les idées, les arts, les institutions communes à plusieurs peuples, sont-elles d'origine diverse ou unique ? Sont-elles l'œuvre de plusieurs individus ou d'un seul ?

Comme vous voyez, ce sont deux hypothèses contraires. Pour considérer d'abord l'hypothèse d'après laquelle chaque idée, chaque art, chaque institution a tiré son origine d'un seul individu, auquel tout le reste du monde l'a emprunté depuis, soit directement, soit indirectement par l'entremise des autres, il est certain qu'une grande partie des idées, des arts, des institutions humaines se sont répandus de cette façon de par la terre. Le fait est trop évident pour que j'aie besoin d'y insister longuement. Considérez, par exemple, les grandes découvertes scientifiques et les grandes inventions mécaniques de nos jours. Aussitôt qu'un esprit supérieur vient de découvrir une nouvelle loi de la nature ou d'inventer un nouveau mécanisme propre soit à améliorer la vie humaine soit à la détruire de la façon la plus facile et la plus rapide possible, tout le monde se hâte de s'approprier cette belle découverte soit pour son propre bénéfice soit pour l'extermination radicale de ses voisins. Ainsi par voie d'emprunt la nouvelle idée ou la nouvelle invention se propage partout et bientôt a fait le tour du monde. C'est également ainsi, mais beaucoup plus lentement, que les grandes religions, comme le Bouddhisme, le Christianisme, le Mahométisme, se sont répandues sur la terre. Il n'y a eu qu'un seul Bouddha, un seul Christ, un seul Mahomet ;

c'est du cerveau solitaire de chacun de ces trois grands génies que ces créations gigantesques sont nées, et c'est par la voie de communication et d'emprunt qu'elles se sont propagées à travers le monde et à travers les siècles.

Mais quelque téméraire qu'il soit de nier que les hommes s'empruntent leurs idées, leurs arts, et leurs institutions les uns aux autres, il serait aussi téméraire, à mon avis, de prétendre qu'un seul homme parmi tant de millions d'hommes ait été capable de trouver telle ou telle vérité, d'inventer tel ou tel mécanisme, de créer telle ou telle institution ; et que jusqu'à ce que ce génie unique ait paru sur la terre, tous les autres hommes aient dû rester sans la connaissance de cette idée, sans l'emploi de ce mécanisme, sans la pratique de cette institution. Soutenir une telle thèse serait vraiment porter contre la nature humaine une accusation d'imbécillité qu'elle n'a pas méritée. Au contraire, l'expérience semble avoir démontré que des hommes différents peuvent très bien concevoir les mêmes idées et faire les mêmes découvertes indépendamment les uns des autres, même quand il s'agit d'idées très complexes et de découvertes très difficiles. Pour ne pas recourir au cas célèbre du calcul différentiel inventé, dit-on, simultanément par Newton et Leibnitz, tout le monde sait que votre grand astronome Leverrier [1] et notre grand astronome Adams ont découvert presque au même moment et indépendamment l'un de l'autre la planète Neptune par des calculs mathématiques très compliqués et très subtils que tous les deux ont basés sur l'observation des perturbations de la planète Uranus. Quelques années plus tard nos deux grands biologues Darwin et Wallace ont imaginé simultané-

[1] This discourse was addressed to a French audience in the Sorbonne

ment et indépendamment l'un de l'autre la même théorie pour expliquer l'évolution organique et l'origine des espèces tant végétales qu'animales. Or cette théorie, loin d'être simple et évidente, était fondée sur une longue série d'observations multiples et de considérations variées et profondes, qui avaient occupé ces deux hommes éminents pendant beaucoup d'années.

Avec de tels exemples de grandes découvertes scientifiques faites, pour ainsi dire, sous nos yeux et presque de notre temps, comment peut-on soutenir que jamais la même idée ne peut venir à l'esprit de deux hommes à la fois ? Que pour la découverte de ses arts, de ses sciences, de ses institutions, la race humaine dépend du hasard qui fait que la nature ou la fortune a doué un seul individu de facultés tout à fait exceptionnelles et hors ligne ? Pour moi, sans nourrir des idées exagérées sur la grandeur de l'esprit humain, je ne le conçois pas si obtus, si dénué d'intelligence qu'une telle théorie le présupposerait.

Donc, pour revenir à nos sauvages, je crois que, tandis que beaucoup des ressemblances qu'on trouve dans les idées, dans les arts, dans les institutions de tribus différentes s'expliquent par la théorie d'emprunt, certaines autres se sont produites indépendamment les unes des autres, grâce à la similitude de l'esprit humain, qui partout, pour répondre aux mêmes besoins de la vie, sait trouver des inventions à peu près pareilles. Certes, à l'égard des découvertes les plus simples, personne, je crois, ne contesterait la possibilité que des hommes puissent indépendamment arriver aux mêmes conclusions. Prenez, par exemple, les propositions les plus élémentaires de l'arithmétique. Que deux et deux font quatre est une vérité, je pense, indiscutable même d'après Einstein. Eh bien, doit-on

supposer que cette vérité ait été découverte une fois pour toutes par un génie mathématique extraordinaire, une sorte de Galilée embryonnaire, et que de sa seule bouche tout le reste du monde l'ait apprise et qu'on l'ait cru sur parole ? Personne, je pense, ne soutiendrait une telle absurdité. On pourrait multiplier à l'infini de tels exemples. Que le soleil se lève en apparence chaque jour à l'est et se couche à l'ouest est une vérité qui assurément n'a pas échappé à la généralité de nos aïeux sauvages : ils n'ont pas dû attendre la naissance d'un astronome de génie pour vérifier une observation que chaque homme et même chaque enfant peut faire tous les jours pour lui-même.

Mais après qu'on a écarté les idées les plus simples et les découvertes les plus faciles, à l'égard desquelles personne n'oserait nier qu'elles ont pu venir à l'esprit de beaucoup d'hommes indépendamment les uns des autres, il reste un grand nombre d'idées plus complexes et de découvertes plus difficiles très répandues dans le monde, à propos desquelles on peut se demander sans absurdité : chacune d'elles a-t-elle été trouvée par un seul individu ou par plusieurs ? A-t-elle eu une origine unique ou multiple ? Prenons, par exemple, la grande découverte du feu, la plus importante peut-être de toutes dans l'histoire de l'humanité, puisque plus que toute autre chose l'usage du feu distingue l'homme de ses anciens rivaux, les fauves. On peut se demander : cette grande découverte a-t-elle été faite par un seul homme, le Prométhée primitif, qui a ensuite communiqué le bienfait à tout le reste du monde, ou bien plusieurs hommes en des lieux différents ont-ils appris indépendamment les uns des autres à utiliser et surtout

à produire le feu, soit en frottant des morceaux de bois, soit en frappant des silex l'un contre l'autre ? A cette question l'état de nos connaissances ne permet pas de donner une réponse dogmatique. Mais s'il m'est permis d'exprimer une opinion sur un sujet si discutable, il me paraît vraisemblable que la découverte a été faite par plusieurs indépendamment plutôt que par un seul homme une fois pour toutes. Si l'on songe que selon toutes les probabilités l'homme a trouvé la façon de produire le feu par un simple hasard, soit en trouant du bois, soit en coupant du silex pour se faire un outil de pierre ; et si l'on songe ensuite au nombre de fois que les hommes sauvages ont troué du bois et coupé du silex, on conviendra, je crois, que ce hasard heureux a dû se reproduire mille fois, et que par conséquent la grande découverte a dû se répéter mille fois dans les temps préhistoriques. Donc, il n'est nullement nécessaire de recourir à la légende d'un Prométhée solitaire pour expliquer l'usage universel du feu parmi les hommes.

On peut dire la même chose à l'égard d'autres arts qu'on trouve répandus parmi les sauvages, tels que ceux d'apprivoiser les animaux, de travailler les métaux, de labourer la terre. Il est possible et même probable que la découverte de chacun de ces procédés utiles s'est répétée à plusieurs reprises en plusieurs parties du monde.

Si l'on nous demande : comment distinguer les découvertes faites une fois pour toutes des découvertes répétées ? il faut avouer qu'un critérium précis nous manque, puisque pour résoudre le problème nous ne disposons que de conjectures plus ou moins vraisemblables. Mais en général on peut dire que plus une découverte est simple, plus il devient probable

qu'elle a été répétée plusieurs fois dans l'histoire ; tandis que plus elle est complexe, plus on est autorisé à croire qu'elle a été trouvée une fois pour toutes par un génie extraordinaire. En d'autres termes, à l'égard des découvertes faites par l'homme, la probabilité d'une origine unique pour chacune d'elles varie en proportion directe de la complexité des idées qu'elle implique. Cependant les exemples que j'ai cités de grandes découvertes scientifiques faites par plus d'un savant à la fois doivent nous avertir de ne pas borner trop étroitement la fertilité du génie humain en supposant que, comme la plante d'aloès, il est incapable de faire pousser plus d'une fois même les plus belles fleurs de la science.

Enfin, pour citer un seul exemple des inventions que le génie humain semble incapable d'enfanter plus d'une fois, je nommerai les contes populaires que Perrault et les frères Grimm, pour ne pas parler d'autres, ont rendus si familiers et si chers à nous tous. Dans les plus célèbres de ces charmantes créations il me semble que les idées sont trop nombreuses et leur combinaison trop complexe pour nous permettre de supposer que plusieurs esprits, sans connaissance les uns des autres, ont pu les imaginer et les disposer de façon à en faire des ensembles à la fois si artificiels et si gracieux. D'ailleurs je suis prêt à suivre les meilleures autorités en croyant qu'au moins une grande partie de ce trésor spirituel a été léguée au monde par l'Inde.

XXXI

THE DANGER OF EXCESSIVE SIMPLIFICATION [1]

He who investigates the history of institutions should constantly bear in mind the extreme complexity of the causes which have built up the fabric of human society, and should be on his guard against a subtle danger incidental to all science, the tendency to simplify unduly the infinite variety of the phenomena by fixing our attention on a few of them to the exclusion of the rest. The propensity to excessive simplification is indeed natural to the mind of man, since it is only by abstraction and generalization, which necessarily imply the neglect of a multitude of particulars, that he can stretch his puny faculties so as to embrace a minute portion of the illimitable vastness of the universe. But if the propensity is natural and even inevitable, it is nevertheless fraught with peril, since it is apt to narrow and falsify our conception of any subject under investigation. To correct it partially—for to correct it wholly would require an infinite intelligence—we must endeavour to broaden our views by taking account of a wide range of facts and possibilities ; and when we have done so to the utmost of our power, we must still remember that from the very nature of things our ideas fall immeasurably short of the reality.

In no branch of learning, perhaps, has this proneness to an attractive but fallacious simplicity wrought more havoc than in the investigation of the early history of mankind ; in particular, the excesses to

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part I. *The Magic Art*, vol. i. pp. 332-334.

which it has been carried have done much to discredit the study of primitive mythology and religion. Students of these subjects have been far too ready to pounce on any theory which adequately explains some of the facts, and forthwith to stretch it so as to cover them all; and when the theory, thus unduly strained, has cracked and broken, as was to be expected, in their unskilful hands, they have pettishly thrown it aside in disgust instead of restricting it, as they should have done from the outset, to the particular class of facts to which it is really applicable. So it fared in our youth with the solar myth theory, which, after being unreasonably exaggerated by its friends, has long been quite as unreasonably rejected altogether by its adversaries; and in more recent times the theories of totemism, magic, and taboo, to take only a few conspicuous examples, have similarly suffered from the excessive zeal of injudicious advocates. This instability of judgement, this tendency of anthropological opinion to swing to and fro from one extreme to another with every breath of new discovery, is perhaps the principal reason why the whole study is still viewed askance by men of sober and cautious temper, who naturally look with suspicion on idols that are set up and worshipped one day only to be knocked down and trampled under foot the next. To these cool observers Max Müller and the rosy Dawn in the nineteenth century stand on the same dusty shelf with Jacob Bryant and Noah's ark in the eighteenth, and they expect with a sarcastic smile the time when the fashionable anthropological topics of the present day will in their turn be consigned to the same peaceful limbo of forgotten absurdities. It is not for the anthropologist himself to anticipate the verdict of

posterity on his labours; still it is his humble hope that the facts which he has patiently amassed will be found sufficiently numerous and solid to bear the weight of some at least of the conclusions which he rests upon them, so that these can never again be lightly tossed aside as the fantastic dreams of a mere bookish student. At the same time, if he is wise, he will be forward to acknowledge and proclaim that our hypotheses at best are but partial, not universal, solutions of the manifold problems which confront us, and that in science as in daily life it is vain to look for one key to open all locks.

XXXII

THE PROBLEMS OF ANTHROPOLOGY[1]

Such are, in the barest outline, a few of the problems with which mental or social anthropology is called upon to deal, and which she must attempt to solve. Hitherto many of them have been the favourite themes of sophists and ranters, of demagogues and dreamers, who by their visions of a Golden Age of universal equality and universal wealth in the future, modelled on the baseless fancy of a like Golden Age in the past, have too often lured the ignorant multitude to the edge of the precipice and pushed them over the brink. Hereafter it will be for anthropology to treat the same themes in a different spirit and by a different method. If she is true to her principles, she will not seek to solve, or to gloze over, the problems by rhetoric and declamation, by cheap appeals to popular senti-

[1] "The Scope and Method of Mental Anthropology," *Science Progress*, No. 64, April 1922, p. 594.

ment and prejudice, by truckling to the passions and the cupidity of the mob. She will seek to solve them by the patient accumulation and the exact investigation of facts, by that and by nothing else, for only thus can she hope to arrive at the truth.

XXXIII

THE PROGRESS OF HUMANITY[1]

Qu'on songe à la grande, l'immense foule de docteurs qui, depuis le moyen âge, ont fait retentir de leur voix les salles de la Sorbonne!

Quelle diversité de doctrines ils ont enseignée! Quelle variété de préceptes ils ont inculquée à leurs élèves! Que de discours subtils, que de déclamations passionnées sur des thèses qui, aux orateurs, semblaient être vérités des plus certaines et des plus importantes, mais qui, à nous autres de cette génération, paraissent soit banales, soit fausses et même absurdes! Et nous qui leur avons succédé et qui occupons leurs sièges pendant quelques heures si brèves, nous nous flattons d'avoir atteint quelques vérités qui ont échappé à nos prédécesseurs, et nous prêchons ces soi-disant vérités avec la même bonne foi, avec la même conviction et la même ardeur qu'eux! Hélas! Messieurs, ne nous trompons pas là-dessus. Ce qui à nous, hommes de la présente génération, paraît être la vraie vérité ne l'est pas, pas plus que celle qui aux yeux de nos devanciers offrait la même apparence trompeuse. Par une nécessité fatale l'homme poursuit toujours la vérité, mais jamais il ne l'atteint. Dans cette pour-

[1] *The Gorgon's Head and other Literary Pieces*, "Sur l'Étude des Origines humaines," pp. 337-339.

suite ce qu'il attrape, ce qu'il saisit, n'est qu'une ombre, un fantôme, une image ; la vraie vérité lui échappe et lui échappera à jamais. La poursuite est sans fin, le but s'éloigne à mesure que nous avançons, comme l'arc-en-ciel qui fuit devant nous et se rit de nos faibles efforts pour le saisir. Contemplant cette poursuite toujours renouvelée et toujours vaine, nous sommes tentés de nous écrier avec le sage : *Vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas !*

Néanmoins pour ma part je ne crois pas que dans cette conclusion décourageante le sage ait eu tout à fait raison. Il me semble que si nous n'atteignons jamais la vérité elle-même, chaque génération arrive à la serrer d'un peu plus près. C'est-à-dire que nous ne tournons pas toujours dans un cercle identique : l'histoire de l'humanité n'est pas un triste cycle d'illusions et de désillusions alternatives : ce n'est pas une oscillation éternelle entre la foi et le scepticisme, entre l'espoir et le désespoir. Non, il y a un progrès lent mais perceptible, qui nous emporte d'un commencement inconnu vers un but également inconnu : l'humanité est, pour ainsi dire, accrochée aux marches d'un grand escalier qui monte depuis des abîmes sombres jusqu'aux hauteurs de plus en plus illuminées d'un jour radieux et céleste. Il ne nous est pas donné, à nous, frêles créatures éphémères, ni de sonder ces abîmes effroyables ni de jeter nos regards vers ces cimes vertigineuses : il nous suffit d'entrevoir celles des marches de ce grand escalier qui sont les plus rapprochées de nous, et de constater que le mouvement général de l'humanité va en montant l'escalier et non pas en le descendant.

C'est l'idée de ce progrès de l'humanité qui a occupé ma pensée et dirigé mes études.

PART II

MAN IN SOCIETY

XXXIV

THE DISCOVERY OF TOTEMISM AND EXOGAMY[1]

THE man who more than any other deserves to rank as the discoverer of totemism and exogamy was the Scotchman John Ferguson McLennan.[2] It was not that he was the first to notice the mere existence of the institutions in various races nor even that he added very much to our knowledge of them. But with the intuition of genius he perceived or divined the far-reaching influence which in different ways the two institutions have exercised on the history of society. The great service which he rendered to science was that he put the right questions; it was not that he answered them aright. He did indeed attempt, with some confidence, to explain the origin of exogamy, but his explanation is probably erroneous. On the origin of totemism he did not even speculate, or, if he did, he never published his speculations. To the last he appears to have regarded that problem as unsolved, if not insoluble.

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i., Preface, pp. vii-viii.

[2] Totemism is the intimate and friendly relation in which the members of a kinship group believe themselves to stand to a particular kind of natural or (rarely) artificial objects, usually a species of animals or plants. Exogamy ("marrying out") is the rule which forbids a man to marry a woman of the group, whether kinship or local, to which he himself belongs. These rough preliminary definitions will be elucidated in what follows.

While McLennan's discovery of exogamy attracted attention and excited discussion, his discovery of totemism made comparatively little stir, and outside of a small circle of experts it passed almost unnoticed in the general world of educated opinion. The very few writers who touched on the subject contributed little to its elucidation. For the most part they contented themselves with repeating a few familiar facts or adding a few fresh theories; they did not attempt a wide induction on the basis of a systematic collection and classification of the evidence. Accordingly, when in the year 1886 my revered friend William Robertson Smith, a disciple of McLennan's, invited me to write the article on totemism for the Ninth Edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, which was then in course of publication under his editorship, I had to do nearly the whole work of collection and classification for myself with very little help from my predecessors.

XXXV

DIFFERENT POSSIBLE ORIGINS OF TOTEMISM AND EXOGAMY [1]

At the outset we shall do well to bear in mind that both totemism and exogamy may possibly have originated in very different ways among different peoples, and that the external resemblances between the institutions in different places may accordingly be deceptive. Instances of such deception might easily be multiplied in other fields of science. Nothing can externally resemble the leaves or branches of certain trees more exactly than certain insects; yet

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. pp. 42-43.

the things which bear such an extraordinary resemblance to each other are not even different species of the same genus; they belong to totally different natural orders, for the one is an animal and the other is a plant. So it may possibly be both with totemism and with exogamy. What we call totemism or exogamy in one people may perhaps be quite different in its origin and nature from totemism and exogamy in another people. This is possible. Yet on the other hand the resemblances between all systems of totemism and all systems of exogamy are so great and so numerous that the presumption is certainly in favour of the view that each of them has everywhere originated in substantially the same way, and that therefore a theory which satisfactorily explains the origin of these institutions in any one race will probably explain its origin in all races. The burden of proof therefore lies on those who contend that there are many different kinds of totemism and exogamy rather than on those who hold that there is substantially only one of each. In point of fact most writers who have set themselves to explain the rise of the two institutions appear to have assumed, and in my judgement rightly assumed, that the solution of each problem is singular.

XXXVI

THE HISTORY OF TOTEMISM [1]

The history of totemism is unknown. Our earliest notices of it date only from the seventeenth century and consist of a few scanty references in the reports written from North America by Jesuit missionaries

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. pp. 16-17.

among the Indians. The eighteenth century added but little to our information on the subject. It was not until the great scientific Renaissance of the nineteenth century that men awoke to the need of studying savagery, and among the additions which the new study made to knowledge not the least important were the discoveries of totemism, exogamy, and the classificatory system of relationship. The discoveries of totemism and exogamy were the work above all of the Scotchman J. F. McLennan; the discovery of the classificatory system of relationship was due to the American L. H. Morgan alone. Unfortunately neither of these great students appreciated the work of the other, and they engaged in bitter and barren controversy over it. We who profit by their genius and labours can now see how the work of each fits into and supplements that of the other. The history of the classificatory system, like that of totemism, is quite unknown; civilized men seem to have had no inkling of its existence till the nineteenth century. Yet we cannot doubt that despite the shortness of their historical record both totemism and the classificatory system of relationship are exceedingly ancient. Of the two it is probable that totemism is much the older. For the classificatory system, as we shall see presently, is founded on exogamy, and there are good grounds for thinking that exogamy is later than totemism.

A strong argument in favour of the antiquity both of totemism and of the classificatory system is their occurrence among some of the most savage and least progressive races of men; for as these rude tribes cannot have borrowed the institutions from more civilized peoples, we are obliged to conclude that they

evolved them at a level of culture even lower than that at which we find them. Yet it would doubtless be a mistake to imagine that even totemism is a product of absolutely primitive man. As I have pointed out elsewhere, all existing savages are probably far indeed removed from the condition in which our remote ancestors were when they ceased to be bestial and began to be human. The embryonic age of humanity lies many thousands, perhaps millions, of years behind us, and no means of research at present known to us hold out the least prospect that we shall ever be able to fill up this enormous gap in the historical record. It is, therefore, only in a relative sense, by comparison with civilized men, that we may legitimately describe any living race of savages as primitive. If we could compare these primitive savages with their oldest human ancestors we should find no doubt that in the interval the progress of intelligence, morality, and the arts of life has been prodigious ; indeed, in all these respects the chasm which divides the modern from the ancient savage may very well be much deeper and wider than that which divides the lowest modern savage from a Shakespeare or a Newton. Hence, even if we could carry ourselves back in time to the very beginnings of totemism, there is no reason to suppose that we should find its authors to be truly primaeval men. The cradle of totemism was not, so far as we can conjecture, the cradle of humanity.

XXXVII

TOTEMISM AND EXOGAMY IN HISTORY [1]

In estimating the part played by totemism in history I have throughout essayed, wherever the occasion offered, to reduce within reasonable limits the extravagant pretensions which have sometimes been put forward on behalf of the institution, as if it had been a factor of primary importance in the religious and economic development of mankind. As a matter of fact the influence which it is supposed to have exercised on economic progress appears to be little more than a shadowy conjecture; and though its influence on religion has been real, it has been greatly exaggerated. By comparison with some other factors, such as the worship of nature and the worship of the dead, the importance of totemism in religious evolution is altogether subordinate. Its main interest for us lies in the glimpse which it affords into the working of the childlike mind of the savage; it is as it were a window opened up into a distant past.

Exogamy is also a product of savagery, but it has few or none of the quaint superstitions which lend a certain picturesque charm to totemism. It is, so to say, a stern Puritanical institution. In its rigid logic, its complex rules, its elaborate terminology, its labyrinthine systems of relationship, it presents an aspect somewhat hard and repellent, a formality almost mathematical in its precision, which the most consummate literary art could hardly mollify or embellish. Yet its interest for the student of history

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i., Preface, pp. xiii-xiv.

is much deeper than that of its gayer and more frivolous sister. For whereas totemism, if it ever existed among the ancestors of the civilized races, has vanished without leaving a trace among their descendants, exogamy has bequeathed to civilization the momentous legacy of the prohibited degrees of marriage.

XXXVIII

TOTEMISM DEFINED[1]

No one who has followed the preceding survey[2] attentively can fail to be struck by the general similarity of the beliefs and customs which it has revealed in tribe after tribe of men belonging to different races and speaking different languages in many widely distant parts of the world. Differences, sometimes considerable differences, of detail do certainly occur, but on the whole the resemblances decidedly preponderate, and are so many and so close that they deserve to be classed together under a common name. The name which students of the subject have bestowed on these beliefs and customs is totemism, a word borrowed from the language of one of the tribes which practise the institution; and while the introduction of new words from barbarous languages is in general to be deprecated, there is some excuse for designating by a barbarous name a barbarous institution to which the institutions of civilized nations offer no analogy. If now, reviewing all the facts, we attempt to frame a general definition of totemism, we may perhaps say that totemism is an intimate

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. pp. 3-5.

[2] This refers to the facts collected in the first three volumes of *Totemism and Exogamy* but omitted in the present volume.

relation which is supposed to exist between a group of kindred people on the one side and a species of natural or artificial objects on the other side, which objects are called the totems of the human group. To this general definition, which probably applies to all purely totemic peoples, it should be added that the species of things which constitutes a totem is far oftener natural than artificial, and that amongst the natural species which are reckoned totems the great majority are either animals or plants.

To define exactly the relation in which totemic people stand to their totems is hardly possible; for exact definitions imply exact thoughts, and the thoughts of savages in the totemic stage are essentially vague, confused, and contradictory. As soon, therefore, as we attempt to give a precise and detailed account of totemism we almost inevitably fall into contradictions, since what we may say of the totemic system of one tribe may not apply without serious modifications and restrictions to the totemic system of another. We must constantly bear in mind that totemism is not a consistent philosophical system, the product of exact knowledge and high intelligence, rigorous in its definitions and logical in its deductions from them. On the contrary it is a crude superstition, the offspring of undeveloped minds, indefinite, illogical, inconsistent. Remembering this, and renouncing any attempt to give logical precision to a subject which does not admit of it, we may say that on the whole the relation in which a man stands to his totem appears to be one of friendship and kinship. He regards the animals or plants or whatever the totems may be as his friends and relations, his fathers, his brothers, and so forth. He puts them as far as

he can on a footing of equality with himself and with his fellows, the members of the same totemic clan. He considers them as essentially his peers, as beings of the same sort as himself and his human kinsmen. In short, so far as it is possible to do so, he identifies himself and his fellow-clansmen with his totem. Accordingly, if the totem is a species of animals he looks upon himself and his fellows as animals of the same species; and on the other hand he regards the animals as in a sense human. Speaking of the Central Australian tribes Messrs. Spencer and Gillen observe: "The totem of any man is regarded, just as it is elsewhere, as the same thing as himself; as a native once said to us when we were discussing the matter with him, 'that one', pointing to his photograph which we had taken, 'is just the same as me; so is a kangaroo' (his totem)." In these brief sentences the whole essence of totemism is summed up: totemism is an identification of a man with his totem, whether his totem be an animal, a plant, or what not.

Thus it is a serious, though apparently a common, mistake to speak of a totem as a god and to say that it is worshipped by the clan. In pure totemism, such as we find it among the Australian aborigines, the totem is never a god and is never worshipped. A man no more worships his totem and regards it as his god than he worships his father and mother, his brother and his sister, and regards them as his gods. He certainly respects his totem and treats it with consideration, but the respect and consideration which he pays to it are the same that he pays to his friends and relations; hence when a totem is an edible animal or plant, he commonly, but not always,

abstains from killing and eating it, just as he commonly, but not always, abstains from killing and eating his friends and relations. But to call this decent respect for his equals the worship of a god is entirely to misapprehend and misrepresent the essence of totemism. If religion implies, as it seems to do, an acknowledgement on the part of the worshipper that the object of his worship is superior to himself, then pure totemism cannot properly be called a religion at all, since a man looks upon his totem as his equal and friend, not at all as his superior, still less as his god. The system is thoroughly democratic ; it is simply an imaginary brotherhood established on a footing of perfect equality between a group of people on the one side and a group of things (generally a species of animals or plants) on the other side. No doubt it may under favourable circumstances develop into a worship of animals or plants, of the sun or the moon, of the sea or the rivers, or whatever the particular totem may have been ; but such worship is never found among the lowest savages, who have totemism in its purest form ; it occurs only among peoples who have made a considerable advance in culture, and accordingly we are justified in considering it as a later phase of religious evolution, as a product of the disruption and decay of totemism proper.

XXXIX

THE DIFFUSION OF TOTEMISM [1]

If we exclude hypotheses and confine ourselves to facts, we may say broadly that totemism is practised

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. pp. 14-16.

by many savage and barbarous peoples, the lower races as we call them, who occupy the continents and islands of the tropics and the Southern Hemisphere, together with a large part of North America, and whose complexion shades off from coal black through dark brown to red. With the doubtful exception of a few Mongoloid tribes in Assam, no yellow and no white race is totemic. Thus if civilization varies on the whole, as it seems to do, directly with complexion, increasing or diminishing with the blanching or darkening of the skin, we may lay it down as a general proposition that totemism is an institution peculiar to the dark-complexioned and least civilized races of mankind who are spread over the tropics and the Southern Hemisphere, but have also overflowed into North America.

The question naturally suggests itself, how has totemism been diffused through so large a part of the human race and over so vast an area of the world? Two answers at least are possible. On the one hand, it may have originated in a single centre and spread thence either through peaceful intercourse between neighbouring peoples or through the migrations and conquests of the people with whom the institution took its rise. Or, on the other hand, it may have sprung up independently in many different tribes as a product of certain general laws of intellectual and social development common to all races of men who are descended from the same stock. However, these two solutions of the problem are not mutually exclusive; for totemism may have arisen independently in a number of tribes and have spread from them to others. There is some indication of such a diffusion of totemism from tribe to tribe on the North-West

coast of America. But a glance at a totemic map of the world may convince us of the difficulty of accounting for the spread of totemism on the theory of a single origin. Such a theory might have been plausible enough if the totemic peoples had been congregated together in the huge compact mass of land which under the names of Europe, Asia, and Africa makes up the greater part of the habitable globe. But on the contrary the tribes which practise totemism are scattered far apart from each other over that portion of the world in which the ocean greatly predominates in area over the land. Seas which to the savage might well seem boundless and impassable roll between the totemic peoples of Australia, India, Africa, and America. What communication was possible, for instance, between the savage aborigines of Southern India and the savage aborigines of North-Eastern America, between the Dravidians and the Iroquois? or again between the tribes of New South Wales and the tribes of Southern Africa, between the Kamilaroi and the Herero? So far as the systems of totemism and kinship among these widely sundered peoples agree with each other, it seems easier to explain their agreement, on the theory of independent origin, as the result of similar minds acting alike to meet the pressure of similar needs. And the immense seas which divide the totemic tribes from each other may suggest a reason why savagery in general and totemism in particular have lingered so long in this portion of the world. The physical barriers which divide mankind, by preventing the free interchange of ideas, are so many impediments to intellectual and moral progress, so many clogs on the advance of civilization. We need

not wonder, therefore, that savagery has kept its seat longest in the Southern Hemisphere and in the New World, which may be called the Oceanic regions of the globe; while on the contrary civilization had its earliest homes in the great continental area of Europe, Asia, and North Africa, where primitive men, as yet unable to battle with the ocean, could communicate freely with each other by land.

XL

THE INDUSTRIAL THEORY OF TOTEMISM [1]

The general explanation of totemism to which the magical ceremonies called *Intichiuma* [2] seem to point is that it is primarily an organized and co-operative system of magic designed to secure for the members of the community, on the one hand, a plentiful supply of all the commodities of which they stand in need, and, on the other hand, immunity from all the perils and dangers to which man is exposed in his struggle with nature. Each totem group, on this theory, was charged with the superintendence and control of some department of nature from which it took its name, and with which it sought, as far as possible, to identify itself. If the things which composed the department assigned to a particular group were beneficial to man, as in the case of edible animals and plants, it was the duty of the group to foster and multiply them; if, on the other hand, they were either noxious by nature

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i. pp. 116-118.

[2] The magical ceremonies called *Intichiuma* are observed by the natives of Central Australia for the multiplication of their totems, which are mostly edible animals or plants. Each clan undertakes to multiply its totem for the benefit of all the other members of the community, who eat of it, though the members of the particular clan whose totem it is do not.

or might, under certain circumstances, become so, as in the case of ravenous beasts, poisonous serpents, rain, wind, snow, and so on, then it was the duty of the group to repress and counteract these harmful tendencies, to remedy any mischief they might have wrought, and perhaps to turn them as efficient engines of destruction against foes. This latter side of totemic magic, which may perhaps be described as the negative or remedial side, hardly appears in our accounts of Central Australian totemism; but we shall meet with examples of it elsewhere.

In favour of this hypothetical explanation of totemism I would urge that it is simple and natural, and in entire conformity with both the practical needs and the modes of thought of savage man. Nothing can be more natural than that man should wish to eat when he is hungry, to drink when he is thirsty, to have fire to warm him when he is cold, and fresh breezes to cool him when he is hot; and to the savage nothing seems simpler than to procure for himself these and all other necessaries and comforts by magic art. We need not, therefore, wonder that in very ancient times communities of men should have organized themselves more or less deliberately for the purpose of attaining objects so natural by means that seemed to them so simple and easy. The first necessity of savage, as of civilized, man is food, and with this it accords that wherever totemism exists the majority of the totems are invariably animals or plants—in other words, things which men can eat. The great significance of this fact has hitherto been concealed from us by the prohibition so commonly laid on members of a totem clan to eat their totem animal or plant. But the discovery of the *Intichiuma*

ceremonies among the Central Australian tribes proves that in keeping our eye on the prohibition to eat the totem we have hitherto been looking at only one side of the medal, and that the less important of the two. For these ceremonies show—what no one had previously dreamed of—that the very man who himself abstains in general from eating his totem will, nevertheless, do all in his power to enable other people to eat it ; nay, that his very business and function in life is to procure for his fellow-tribesmen a supply of the animal or plant from which he takes his name, and to which he stands in so intimate a relation. With the new facts before us, we may safely conjecture that whatever the origin of the prohibition observed by each clan to eat its totem, that prohibition is essentially subordinate, and probably ancillary, to the great end of enabling the community as a whole to eat of it —in other words, of contributing to the common food supply.

Viewed in this light, totemism is a thoroughly practical system designed to meet the everyday wants of the ordinary man in a clear and straightforward way. There is nothing vague or mystical about it, nothing of that metaphysical haze which some writers love to conjure up over the humble beginnings of human speculation, but which is utterly foreign to the simple, sensuous, and concrete modes of thought of the savage. Yet for all its simplicity and directness we cannot but feel that there is something impressive, and almost grandiose, in the comprehensiveness, the completeness, the vaulting ambition of this scheme, the creation of a crude and barbarous philosophy. All nature has been mapped out into departments : all men have been distributed into corresponding groups ; and to

each group of men has been assigned, with astounding audacity, the duty of controlling some one department of nature for the common good. Religion, it will be observed, has no place in the scheme. Man is still alone with nature, and fancies he can sway it at his will. Later on, when he discovers his mistake, he will bethink himself of gods, and beg them to pull for him the strings that hang beyond his reach.

XLI

THE CONCEPTIONAL THEORY OF TOTEMISM [1]

After long reflection it occurred to me that the simple idea, the primitive superstition at the root of totemism, may perhaps be found in the mode by which the Central Australian aborigines still determine the totems of every man, woman, and child of the tribe. That mode rests on a primitive theory of conception. Ignorant of the true causes of childbirth, they imagine that a child only enters into a woman at the moment when she first feels it stirring in her womb, and accordingly they have to explain to themselves why it should enter her body at that particular moment. Necessarily it has come from outside and therefore from something which the woman herself may have seen or felt immediately before she knew herself to be with child. The theory of the Central Australians is that a spirit child has made its way into her from the nearest of those trees, rocks, water-pools, or other natural features at which the spirits of the dead are waiting to be born again ; and since only the spirits of people of one particular totem are believed to congregate at any

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. pp. 57-64.

one spot, and the natives well know what totemic spirits haunt each hallowed plot of ground, a woman has no difficulty in determining the totem of her unborn child. If the child entered her, that is, if she felt her womb quickened, near a tree haunted by spirits of Kangaroo people, then her child will be of the kangaroo totem ; if she felt the first premonitions of maternity near a rock tenanted by spirits of Emu people, then her child will be of the emu totem ; and so on throughout the whole length of the totemic gamut. This is not a matter of speculation. It is the belief held universally by all the tribes of Central and Northern Australia, so far as these beliefs are known to us.

Obviously, however, this theory of conception does not by itself explain totemism, that is, the relation in which groups of people stand to species of things. It stops short of doing so by a single step. What a woman imagines to enter her body at conception is not an animal, a plant, a stone, or what not ; it is only the spirit of a human child which has an animal, a plant, a stone, or what not for its totem. Had the woman supposed that what passed into her at the critical moment was an animal, a plant, a stone, or what not, and that when her child was born it would be that animal, plant, or stone, in human form, then we should have a complete explanation of totemism. For the essence of totemism, as I have repeatedly pointed out, consists in the identification of a man with a thing, whether an animal, a plant, or what not ; and that identification would be complete if a man believed himself to be the very thing, whether animal, plant, or what not, which had entered his mother's womb at conception and had issued from it at child-

birth. Accordingly I conjectured that the Central Australian beliefs as to conception are but one remove from absolutely primitive totemism, which, on my theory, ought to consist in nothing more or less than in a belief that women are impregnated without the help of men by something which enters their womb at the moment when they first feel it quickened; for such a belief would perfectly explain the essence of totemism, that is, the identification of groups of people with groups of things. Thus, if I was right, the clue to totemism was found just where we might most reasonably expect to find it, namely, in the beliefs and customs of the most primitive totemic people known to us, the Australian aborigines. In fact the clue had been staring us in the face for years, though we did not recognize it.

But a link in the chain of evidence was wanting; for, as I have just pointed out, the Australian beliefs cannot be regarded as absolutely primitive. Three years after I propounded my theory, the missing link was found, the broken chain was completed, by the researches of Dr. W. H. R. Rivers; for in the Banks' Islands he discovered a series of beliefs and customs which fulfil exactly my theoretical definition of absolutely primitive totemism. The facts have already been fully laid before the reader[1]; here I need only briefly recapitulate them. In some of these islands many of the people identify themselves with certain animals or fruits and believe that they themselves partake of the qualities and character of these animals or fruits. Consistently with this belief they refuse to eat animals or fruits of these sorts, on the ground that to do so would be a kind of cannibalism; they

[1] In *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. ii. pp. 89 *sqq.*

would in a manner be eating themselves. The reason they give for holding this belief and observing this conduct is that their mothers were impregnated by the entrance into their wombs of spirit animals or spirit fruits, and that they themselves are nothing but the particular animal or plant which effected a lodgement in their mother and in due time was born into the world with a superficial and deceptive resemblance to a human being. That is why they partake of the character of the animal or plant; that is why they refuse to eat animals or plants of that species. This is not called totemism, but nevertheless it appears to be totemism in all its pristine simplicity. Theoretically it is an explanation of childbirth resting on a belief that conception can take place without cohabitation; practically it is respect paid to species of animals, plants, or other natural objects, on the ground of their assumed identity with human beings. The practice has long been known as totemism; the theory which explains the practice has now been disclosed by the discoveries of Messrs. Spencer and Gillen in Central Australia and of Dr. W. H. R. Rivers in the Banks' Islands.

Here at last we seem to find a complete and adequate explanation of the origin of totemism. The conceptional theory, as I have called my third and so far as I can see my final theory of totemism, accounts for all the facts in a simple and natural manner. It explains why people commonly abstain from killing and eating their totemic animals and plants or otherwise injuring their totems. The reason is that, identifying themselves with their totems, they are naturally careful not to hurt or destroy them. It explains why some people on the other hand

consider themselves bound occasionally to eat a portion of the totemic animal or plant. The reason again is that, identifying themselves with their totem, they desire to maintain and strengthen that identity by assimilating from time to time its flesh and blood or vegetable tissues. It explains why people are often supposed to partake of the qualities and character of their totems. The reason again is that, identifying themselves with their totems, they necessarily partake of the totemic qualities and character. It explains why men often claim to exercise a magical control over their totems, in particular a power of multiplying them. The reason again is that, identifying themselves with their totems, they naturally suppose themselves invested with the like powers for the multiplication or control of the species. It explains why people commonly believe themselves to be descended from their totemic animals and plants, and why women are sometimes said to have given birth to these animals or plants. The reason is that these animals or plants or their spirits are supposed to have actually entered into the mothers of the clan and to have been born from them in human form. It explains the whole of the immense range of totems from animals and plants upwards or downwards to the greatest works of nature on the one side and to the meanest handiwork of man on the other. The reason is that there is nothing from the light of the sun or the moon or the stars down to the humblest implement of domestic utility which may not have impressed a woman's fancy at the critical season and have been by her identified with the child in her womb. Lastly, it explains why totemic peoples often confuse their ancestors with their totems. The

reason is that, regarding their ancestors as animals or plants in essence, though human in form, they find it hard to distinguish even in thought between their outward human appearance and their inward bestial or vegetable nature; they think of them vaguely both as men and as animals or plants; the contradiction between the two things does not perplex them, though they cannot picture it clearly to their minds. Haziness is characteristic of the mental vision of the savage. Like the blind man of Bethsaida he sees men like trees and animals walking in a thick intellectual fog. Thus in the conceptional theory we seem to find a sufficient explanation of all the facts and fancies of totemism.

We conclude, then, that the ultimate source of totemism is a savage ignorance of the physical process by which men and animals reproduce their kinds; in particular it is an ignorance of the part played by the male in the generation of offspring. Surprising as such ignorance may seem to the civilized mind, a little reflection will probably convince us that, if mankind has indeed been evolved from lower forms of animal life, there must have been a period in the history of our race when ignorance of paternity was universal among men. The part played by the mother in the production of offspring is obvious to the senses and cannot but be perceived even by the animals; but the part played by the father is far less obvious and is indeed a matter of inference only, not of perception. How could the infantine intelligence of the primitive savage perceive that the child which comes forth from the womb is the fruit of the seed which was sowed there nine long months before? He is ignorant, as we know from the example of the

Australian aborigines, of the simple truth that a seed sowed in the earth will spring up and bear fruit. How then could he infer that children are the result of a similar process? His ignorance is therefore a natural and necessary phase in the intellectual development of our race. But while he could not for long ages divine the truth as to the way in which children come into the world, it was inevitable that so soon as he began to think at all he should turn his thoughts to this most important and most mysterious event, so constantly repeated before his eyes, so essential to the continuance of the species. If he formed a theory about anything it would naturally be about this. And what theory could seem to him more obviously suggested by the facts than that the child only enters into the mother's womb at the moment when she first feels it stirring within her? How could he think that the child was there long before she felt it? From the standpoint of his ignorance such a supposition might well appear unreasonable and absurd. And if the child enters the woman only at the first quickening of her womb, what more natural than to identify it with something that simultaneously struck her fancy and perhaps mysteriously vanished? It might be a kangaroo that hopped before her and disappeared in a thicket; it might be a gay butterfly that flickered past in the sunshine with the metallic brilliancy of its glittering wings, or a gorgeous parrot flapping by resplendent in soft plumage of purple, crimson, and orange. It might be the sunbeams streaming down on her through an opening in a forest glade, or the moonbeams sparkling and dancing on the water, till a driving cloud suddenly blotted out the silvery orb. It might be the sighing

of the wind in the trees, or the surf on some stormy shore, its hollow roar sounding in her ears like the voice of a spirit borne to her from across the sea. Anything indeed that struck a woman at that mysterious moment of her life when she first knows herself to be a mother might easily be identified by her with the child in her womb. Such maternal fancies, so natural and seemingly so universal, appear to be the root of totemism.

Thus the present diffusion of totemism over a large part of the world is explained by causes which at a very remote time probably operated equally among all races of men, to wit, an ignorance of the true source of childbirth combined with a natural curiosity on the subject. We need not suppose that the institution has been borrowed to any great extent by one race from another. It may have everywhere sprung independently from the same simple root in the mental constitution of man. But it would be a great mistake to imagine that the cause which originated the institution has survived wherever the institution itself still lingers, in other words, that all totemic peoples are totally ignorant of paternity. In the history of society it constantly happens that a custom, once started, continues to be practised long after the motive which originated it has been forgotten; by the mere force of inertia an institution goes sliding along the old well-worn groove though the impetus which first set it in motion may have died out ages ago. So it has been with totemism. The institution is still observed by many tribes who are perfectly familiar with the part which the father plays in the begetting of children. Still even among them the new knowledge has not always entirely dispelled the ancient ignorance. Some

of them still think that the father's help, though usual, is not indispensable for the production of offspring. Thus the Baganda firmly believe that a woman may be impregnated by the purple flower of the banana falling on her shoulders, or by the spirits of suicides and misborn infants which dart into her from their dishonoured graves at the cross-roads. Even among civilized races which have long sloughed off totemism, if they ever had it, traces of the same primaeval ignorance survive in certain marriage customs which are still observed in England, in certain rites which barren women still perform in the hope of obtaining a mother's joys, and in a multitude of popular tales, which set forth how a virgin conceived and brought forth a child without contact with the other sex. Ages after such stories cease to be told of common people they continue to be related with childlike faith of heroes and demigods. The virgin birth of these worshipful personages is now spoken of as supernatural, but to the truly primitive savage it seems perfectly natural; indeed, he knows of no other way in which people are born into the world. In short, a belief that a virgin can conceive and bring forth a child is one of the last lingering relics of primitive savagery.

XLII

THE SAVAGE THEORY OF CONCEPTION [1]

I have said that the form of totemism which prevails in the most central tribes of Australia, particularly the Arunta and Kaitish, is probably the most primitive

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i. pp. 157-159.

known to exist at the present day. Perhaps we may go a step farther, and say that it is but one remove from the original pattern, the absolutely primitive type of totemism. The theory on which it is based denies implicitly, and the natives themselves deny explicitly, that children are the fruit of the commerce of the sexes. So astounding an ignorance of natural causation cannot but date from a past immeasurably remote. Yet that ignorance, strange as it seems to us, may be explained easily enough from the habits and modes of thought of savage man. In the first place, the interval which elapses between the act of impregnation and the first symptoms of pregnancy is sufficient to prevent him from perceiving the connexion between the two. In the second place, the custom, common among savage tribes, of allowing unrestricted licence of intercourse between the sexes under puberty has familiarized him with sexual unions that are necessarily sterile ; from which he may not unnaturally conclude that the intercourse of the sexes has nothing to do with the birth of offspring. Hence he is driven to account for pregnancy and childbirth in some other way. The theory which the Central Australians have adopted on the subject is one which commends itself to the primitive mind as simple and obvious. Nothing is commoner among savages all the world over than a belief that a person may be possessed by a spirit, which has entered into him, thereby disturbing his organism and creating an abnormal state of body or mind, such as sickness or lunacy. Now, when a woman is observed to be pregnant, the savage infers, with perfect truth, that something has entered into her. What is it ? and how did it make its way into her womb ? These are questions

which he cannot but put to himself as soon as he thinks about the matter. For the reasons given above, it does not occur to him to connect the first symptoms of pregnancy with a sexual act, which preceded them by a considerable interval. He thinks that the child enters into the woman at the time when she first feels it stirring in her womb, which, of course, does not happen until long after the real moment of conception. Naturally enough, when she is first aware of the mysterious movement within her, the mother fancies that something has that very moment passed into her body, and it is equally natural that in her attempt to ascertain what the thing is she should fix upon some object that happened to be near her and to engage her attention at the critical moment. Thus if she chanced at the time to be watching a kangaroo, or collecting grass-seed for food, or bathing in water, or sitting under a gum-tree, she might imagine that the spirit of a kangaroo, of grass-seed, of water, or of a gum-tree had passed into her, and accordingly that, when her child was born, it was really a kangaroo, a grass-seed, water, or a gum-tree, though to the bodily eye it presented the outward form of a human being. Amongst the objects on which her fancy might pitch as the cause of her pregnancy we may suppose that the last food she had eaten would often be one. If she had recently partaken of emu flesh or yams she might suppose that the emu or yam, which she had unquestionably taken into her body, had, so to say, struck root and grown up in her. This last, as perhaps the most natural, might be the commonest explanation of pregnancy ; and if that was so, we can understand why, among the Central Australian tribes, if not among totemic tribes all over the world, the great

majority of totems are edible objects, whether animals or plants.

XLIII

THE PRIMITIVE CONCEPTION OF PATERNITY[1]

We have to bear in mind that the notion of paternity among these tribes of Central Australia is a totally different thing from what it is with us. Denying, as they do explicitly, that the child is begotten by the father, they can only regard him as the consort, and, in a sense, the owner of the mother, and therefore, as the owner of her progeny, just as a man who owns a cow owns also the calf she brings forth. In short, it seems probable that a man's children were viewed as his property long before they were recognized as his offspring.

XLIV

TOTEMISM IN FAIRY TALES[2]

All stories of estrangement between a man and his fairy wife belong to the class of which the tales of the Swan Maiden and of Beauty and the Beast are typical examples. Finding narratives of this sort told by totemic peoples to explain their totemic taboos we may conjecture that they all sprang, directly or indirectly, from the cycle of ideas and customs which centre round the institution of totemism. In some of these tales the husband, in others the wife, is a fairy who shifts his or her shape from bestial or vegetable to human, and who will leave his or her sorrowing partner for ever to return to the beasts

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i. p. 167.
[2] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. ii. pp. 570-571.

or the plants if a particular taboo relating to his or her animal or vegetable nature be infringed. Such stories are explained naturally and simply on the supposition that they referred originally to husbands and wives who, under a system of totemism and exogamy, would claim kindred with animals or plants of different kinds, the husband assimilating himself to one sort of creature and the wife to another. In such households husband and wife would naturally resent any injury done to their animal kinsfolk as a wrong done to themselves; and domestic jars would easily arise whenever one of the couple failed to respect the humble relations of the other. Among some totemic tribes the danger of these intestine feuds is to some extent obviated by the rule that husband and wife must each pay due respect to the totem of the other, but such mutual obligations appear to be rare; so far as we can judge from the accounts, the usual custom of totemic peoples is that men and women revere each their own totem, but are not bound to show any reverence for the totems of their spouses. In these circumstances husband and wife are constantly liable to quarrel over their totems, and it would be natural enough that such bickerings should often result in a permanent separation. Totemism may have embittered many lives and broken many hearts. A reminiscence of such quarrels and estrangements is apparently preserved in the sad story of the fairy wife or the fairy husband who lives happily for a time with a human spouse, but only in the end to be parted for ever.

XLV

TOTEMISM AND THE ORIGIN OF AGRICULTURE [1]

If totemism as such has not fostered economic progress directly, it may have done so indirectly. In fact it might perhaps be argued that accidentally totemism has led the way to agriculture and the domestication of animals, possibly even to the use of the metals. Its claims to these great discoveries and inventions are indeed very slender, but perhaps they are not quite beneath notice. In regard to agriculture the magical ceremonies performed by the Grass-seed clan of the Kaitish might easily lead to a rational cultivation of grass. The Kaitish, like all the aborigines of Australia, are in their native state totally ignorant of the simple truth that a seed planted in the ground will grow and multiply. Hence it has never occurred to them to sow seed in order to obtain a crop. But though they do not adopt this rational mode of accomplishing their end, they have recourse to many irrational and absurd ceremonies for making the grass to grow and bear seed. Amongst other things the headman of the Grass-seed clan takes a quantity of grass-seed in his mouth and blows the seeds about in all directions. So far as the Grass-seed man's mind is concerned, this ceremony of blowing seeds about is precisely on a level with the ceremony of pouring his own blood on stones, which a man of the kangaroo totem performs with great solemnity for the purpose of multiplying kangaroos. But in the eyes of nature and in our

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. pp. 19-20.

eyes the two ceremonies have very different values. We know that we may pour our blood on stones till we die without producing a single kangaroo from the stones; but we also know that if we blow seeds about in the air some of them are very likely to sink into the ground, germinate, and bear fruit after their kind. Even the savage might in time learn to perceive that, though grass certainly springs from the ground where the Grass-seed man blew the seed about, no kangaroos ever spring from the stones which have been fertilized with the blood of a Kangaroo man; and if this simple truth had once firmly impressed itself on a blank page of his mind, the Grass-seed man might continue to scatter grass-seed with very good effect long after the Kangaroo man had ceased to bedabble rocks with his gore in the vain expectation of producing a crop of kangaroos. Thus with the advance of knowledge the magic of the Grass-seed man would rise in public esteem, while that of the Kangaroo man would fall into disrepute. From such humble beginnings a rational system of agriculture might in the course of ages be developed.

On the other hand, it is possible that people who have animals for their totems may sometimes accidentally resort to more effective modes of multiplying them than pouring blood on stones. They may in fact capture and tame the animals and breed them in captivity. Totemism may thus have led to the domestication of cattle.

XLVI

WOMAN'S PART IN THE ORIGIN OF AGRICULTURE[1]

In the customs observed by savages who are totally ignorant of agriculture we may perhaps detect some of the steps by which mankind have advanced from the enjoyment of the wild fruits of the earth to the systematic cultivation of plants. For an effect of digging up the earth in the search for roots, which is chiefly the work of women, has probably been in many cases to enrich and fertilize the soil and so to increase the crop of roots or herbs ; and such an increase would naturally attract the natives in larger numbers and enable them to subsist for longer periods on the spot without being compelled by the speedy exhaustion of the crop to shift their quarters and wander away in search of fresh supplies. Moreover, the winnowing of the seeds by women on ground which they had already turned up by their digging-sticks would naturally contribute to the same result. For though savages at the level of the Californian Indians and the aborigines of Australia have no idea of using seeds for any purpose but that of immediate consumption, and it has never occurred to them to incur a temporary loss for the sake of a future gain by sowing them in the ground, yet it is almost certain that in the process of winnowing the seeds as a preparation for eating them many of the grains must have escaped and, being wafted by the wind, have fallen on the upturned soil and borne fruit. Thus by the operations

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part V. *The Spirits of the Corn*, vol. i. pp. 128-129.

of turning up the ground and winnowing the seed, though neither operation aimed at anything beyond satisfying the immediate pangs of hunger, savage man or rather savage woman was unconsciously preparing for the whole community a future and more abundant store of food, which would enable them to multiply and to abandon the old migratory and wasteful manner of life for a more settled and economic mode of existence. So curiously sometimes does man, aiming his shafts at a near but petty mark, hit a greater and more distant target.

XLVII

TOTEMISM AND ART [1]

While totemism has not demonstrably enlarged the material resources or increased the wealth of its votaries, it seems unquestionably to have done something to stir in them a sense of art and to improve the manual dexterity which is requisite to embody artistic ideals. If it was not the mother, it has been the foster-mother of painting and sculpture. The rude drawings on the ground, in which the natives of Central Australia depict with a few simple colours their totems and the scenes of their native land, may be said to represent the germ of that long development which under happier skies blossomed out into the frescoes of Michael Angelo, the cartoons of Raphael, the glowing canvases of Titian, and the unearthly splendours of Turner's divine creations. And among these same primitive savages totemism has suggested a beginning of plastic

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. p. 25.

as well as of pictorial art; for in the magical ceremonies which they perform for the multiplication or the control of their totems they occasionally fashion great images of the totemic animals, sometimes constructing out of boughs the effigy of a witchetty grub in its chrysalis state, sometimes moulding a long tortuous mound of wet sand into the likeness of a wriggling water-snake. Now it is to be observed that the motive which leads the Australian aborigines to represent their totems in pictorial or in plastic forms is not a purely aesthetic one; it is not a delight in art for art's sake. Their aim is thoroughly practical; it is either to multiply magically the creatures that they may be eaten, or to repress them magically that they may not harm their votaries. In short, in all such cases art is merely the handmaid of magic: it is employed as an instrument by the totemic magicians to ensure a supply of food or to accomplish some other desirable object. Thus in Australia, as in many other parts of the world, magic may with some show of reason be called the nursing mother of art.

XLVIII

EFFECT OF TOTEMISM IN STRENGTHENING THE SOCIAL TIES[1]

If totemism has apparently done little to foster the growth of higher forms of religion, it has probably done much to strengthen the social ties and thereby to serve the cause of civilization, which depends for its progress on the cordial co-operation of men in society, on their mutual trust and good-will, and on

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. pp. 38-40.

their readiness to subordinate their personal interests to the interests of the community. A society thus united in itself is strong and may survive; a society rent by discord and dissension is weak and likely to perish either through internal disruption or by the impact of other societies, themselves perhaps individually weaker, yet collectively stronger, because they act as one. The tendency of totemism to knit men together in social groups is noticed again and again by the writers who have described the institution from personal observation. They tell us that persons who have the same totem regard each other as kinsmen and are ready to befriend and stand by one another in difficulty and danger. Indeed, the totemic tie is sometimes deemed more binding than that of blood. A sense of common obligations and common responsibility pervades the totem clan. Each member of it is answerable even with his life for the deeds of every other member; each of them resents and is prompt to avenge a wrong done to his fellows as a wrong done to himself. In nothing does this solidarity of the clan come out more strikingly than in the law of the blood feud. The common rule is that the whole of a clan is responsible for a homicide committed by any of its members, and that if the manslayer himself is for any reason beyond the reach of vengeance, his crime may and should be visited by the clan of his victim on any member of the murderer's clan, even though the person to be punished may have had no hand whatever in the murder. To civilized men it seems unjust that the innocent should thus be made to suffer for the guilty, and no doubt, if we regard the matter from a purely abstract point of view, we must affirm that the infliction of vicarious suffering is morally wrong and

indefensible ; no man, we say, and say rightly, ought to be punished except for his own act and deed. Yet if we look at the facts of life as they are and not as they ought to be, we can hardly help concluding that the principle of collective responsibility, with its necessary corollary of vicarious suffering, has been of the greatest utility, perhaps absolutely essential, to the preservation and well-being of society. Nothing else, probably, could have availed to keep primitive men together in groups large enough to make headway against the opposition of hostile communities ; in the struggle for existence a tribe which attempted to deal out even-handed justice between man and man on the principle of individual responsibility would probably have succumbed before a tribe which acted as one man on the principle of collective responsibility. Before the champions of abstract justice could have ascertained the facts, laid the blame on the real culprit, and punished him as he deserved, they must have run a serious risk of being exterminated by their more impetuous and less scrupulous neighbours.

However much, therefore, the principle of collective responsibility may be condemned in theory, there can hardly be a doubt that it has been very useful in practice. If it has done great injustice to individuals, it has done great service to the community ; the many have benefited by the sufferings of a few. Men are far readier to repress wrong-doing in others if they think that they themselves stand a chance of being punished for it than if they know that the punishment will only fall on the actual offender. Thus a habit is begotten of regarding all misdemeanours with severe disapprobation as injuries done to the whole society ; and this habit of mind may grow into an instinctive

condemnation and abhorrence of wrong-doing, apart from the selfish consideration of any harm which the wrong may possibly entail on the person who condemns and abhors it. In short, the principle of collective responsibility not only checks crime but tends to reform the criminal by fostering a disinterested love of virtue and so enabling society to adopt in time a standard of justice which approaches more nearly to the ideal.

So far, therefore, as totemism has drawn closer the bonds which unite men in society it has directly promoted the growth of a purer and higher morality. An institution which has done this has deserved well of humanity. Its speculative absurdities may be forgiven for the sake of its practical good, and in summing up judgement we may perhaps pronounce that sentence of acquittal which was pronounced long ago on another poor sinner: *Remittuntur ei peccata multa, quoniam dilexit multum.*

XLIX

THE PROBLEM OF EXOGAMY [1]

The hypothesis that totemism is, in its origin, a savage theory of conception seems to furnish a simple and adequate explanation of the facts. But there is one feature of totemism, as that system commonly meets us, which the hypothesis does not account for, namely, the exogamy of the totem stocks; in other words, the rule that a man may not marry nor have connexion with a woman of the same totem as himself. That rule is, indeed, quite inexplicable on the view that

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i. pp. 162-165.

men and women regard themselves as identical with their totem animals; for as these animals mate with their kind, why should not men and women of the same totem do so too, seeing that they are only slightly disguised forms of their totem animal? But the truth is that exogamy forms no part of true totemism. It is a great social reform of a much later date, which, in many communities, has accidentally modified the totemic system, while in others it has left that system entirely unaffected. Native Australian traditions represent, doubtless with truth, exogamy as an innovation imported into a community already composed of totem stocks; and these traditions are amply confirmed by a study of the social organization of the Australian tribes, which proves, as Messrs. Howitt, Spencer, and Gillen have rightly perceived, that the primary exogamous unit was not the totem stock, but the moiety of the whole tribe. Each tribe was, in fact, divided into two halves, all the children of the same mother being assigned to the same half, and the men of each half were obliged to take their wives from the other half. At a later time each of these halves was, in some tribes, again subdivided into two, and the men and women in each of the four quarters thus constituted were forced to take their wives or husbands from a particular one, and only one, of the remaining three quarters; while it was arranged that the children should belong neither to their mother's nor to their father's quarter, but to one of the remaining two quarters. The effect of the division of the tribe into two exogamous halves, with all the children of the same mother ranged on the same side, is obviously to prevent the marriage of brothers with sisters. The effect of the division of the tribe into four exogamous

quarters, coupled with the rules that every person may marry only into one quarter, and that the children must belong to a quarter which is neither that of their father nor that of their mother, is to prevent the marriage of parents with children. Now, since these successive bisections of the tribe into two, four, or even eight exogamous divisions, with an increasingly complicated rule of descent, have every appearance of being artificial, we may fairly infer that the effect they actually produce is the effect they were intended to produce; in other words, that they were deliberately devised and adopted as a means of preventing the marriage, at first, of brothers with sisters, and, at a later time, of parents with children.

That this was so I regard as practically certain. But the question why early man in Australia, and, apparently, in many other parts of the world, objected to these unions, and took elaborate precautions to prevent them, is difficult to answer, except in a vague and general way. We should probably err if we imagined that this far-reaching innovation or reform was introduced from any such moral antipathy to incest as most, though by no means all, races have manifested within historical times. That antipathy is rather the fruit than the seed of the prohibition of incest. It is the slowly accumulated effect of a prohibition which has been transmitted through successive generations from time immemorial. To suppose that the law of incest originated in any instinctive horror of the act would be to invert the relation of cause and effect, and to commit the commonest of all blunders in investigating early society, that of interpreting it in the light of our modern feelings and habits, and so using the late products of evolution to account for its

primordial germs; in short, it would be to explain the beginning by the end, instead of the end by the beginning.

Further, the original ground of objection to incestuous unions certainly cannot have been any notion that they were injurious to the offspring, and that for two reasons. In the first place, it is a moot question among men of science at the present day whether the closest inbreeding has, in itself, when the parents are perfectly healthy, any such harmful effect. However that question may be finally decided, we cannot suppose that the rudest savages perceived ages ago what, with all the resources of accurate observation and long-continued experiments in breeding animals, modern science has not yet conclusively established. But in the second place, not only is it impossible that the savage can have detected so very dubious an effect, but it is impossible that he can even have imagined it. For if, down to the present day, the Central Australians, who practise strict exogamy, do not believe that children are the result of the intercourse of the sexes, their still ruder forefathers certainly cannot have introduced exogamy at a more or less remote period for the purpose of remedying the action of a cause, the existence of which they denied.

L

THE ORIGIN OF EXOGAMY IN AUSTRALIA [1]

These very primitive savages have carried out the principle of exogamy with a practical ingenuity and a logical thoroughness and precision such as no other

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. pp. 105-112, 120-121.

known race of men exhibit in their marriage system; and accordingly a study of their matrimonial institutions, which have been accurately described by highly competent observers, affords a better insight into the meaning of exogamy than can be obtained elsewhere. It is accordingly to Australia that we must look for a solution of the enigma of exogamy as well as of totemism.

Full details as to the Australian systems of marriage have already been laid before the reader,[1] and I have exhibited their general principles in outline so as to bring out clearly their aim and purpose. We have seen that these marriage systems fall into a series of varying complexity from the two-class system, which is the simplest, to the eight-class system, which is the most complex, with a four-class system occupying an intermediate position between the two extremes. All three systems—the two-class system, the four-class system, and the eight-class system—are compatible either with male or with female descent; and in fact the two-class system and the four-class system are actually found sometimes with male and sometimes with female descent, while on the other hand the eight-class system has hitherto been discovered with male descent only. Further, I pointed out that these three systems appear to have been produced by a series of successive bisections of the community, the two-class system resulting from the first bisection, the four-class system resulting from the second bisection, and the eight-class system resulting from the third bisection. Further, we saw that the effect of these successive bisections of the community into exogamous classes, with their characteristic rules of

[1] In *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i. pp. 175-579.

descent, was to bar the marriage of persons whom the natives regard as too near of kin, each new bisection striking out a fresh list of kinsfolk from the number of those with whom marriage might be lawfully contracted; and as the effect produced by these means is in accordance with the deeply-rooted opinions and feelings of the natives on the subject of marriage, we appear to be justified in inferring that each successive bisection of the community was deliberately instituted for the purpose of preventing the marriage of near kin. In no other way does it seem possible to explain in all its details a system at once so complex and so regular. It is hardly too much to affirm that no other human institution bears the impress of deliberate design stamped on it more clearly than the exogamous classes of the Australian aborigines. To suppose that they have originated through a series of undesigned coincidences, and that they only subserve by accident the purpose which they actually fulfil and which is cordially approved of by the natives themselves, is to tax our credulity almost as heavily as it would be to suppose that the complex machinery of a watch has come together without human design by a mere fortuitous concourse of atoms, and that the purpose which it serves of marking time on the dial, and for the sake of which the owner of the watch carries it about with him, is simply an accidental result of its atomic configuration. The attempt in the name of science to eliminate human will and purpose from the history of early human institutions fails disastrously when the attempt is made upon the marriage system of the Australian aborigines.

We have seen, first, that the effect of the two-class

system is to bar the marriage of brothers with sisters in every case, but not in all cases the marriage of parents with children, nor the marriage of certain first cousins, namely, the children of a brother and of a sister respectively; second, that the effect of the four-class system is to bar the marriage of brothers with sisters and of parents with children in every case, but not the marriage of first cousins, the children of a brother and of a sister respectively; thirdly, that the effect of the eight-class system is to bar the marriage of brothers with sisters, of parents with children, and of first cousins, the children of a brother and of a sister respectively.

Hence if we are right in assuming that these three marriage systems were instituted successively and in this order for the purpose of effecting just what they do effect, it follows that the two-class system was instituted to prevent the marriage of brothers with sisters; that the four-class system was instituted to prevent the marriage of parents with children; and that the eight-class system was instituted to prevent the marriage of certain first cousins, the children of a brother and of a sister respectively, the marriage of all other first cousins (the children of two brothers or of two sisters) having been already prevented by the institution of the two-class system. If this inference is correct, we see that in Australia exogamy originated, just as Morgan supposed, in an attempt to prevent the marriage of brothers with sisters, and that the prohibitions of marriage with parents and with certain first cousins followed later. Thus the primary prohibition is that of marriage between brothers and sisters and not, as might perhaps have been expected, between parents and children. From this it does not

necessarily follow that the Australian aborigines entertain a deeper horror of incest between brothers and sisters than of incest between parents and children. All that we can fairly infer is that before the two-class system was instituted incest between brothers and sisters had been commoner than incest between parents and children, and that accordingly the first necessity was to prevent it. The aversion to incest between parents and children appears to be universal among the Australian aborigines, as well among tribes with two classes as among tribes with four classes, although the two-class system itself is not a bar to certain cases of that incest. Thus we perceive, what it is important to bear steadily in mind, that the dislike of certain marriages must always have existed in the minds of the people, or at least in the minds of their leaders, before that dislike, so to say, received legal sanction by being embodied in an exogamous rule. In democratic societies, like those of the Australian savages, law only gives practical effect to thoughts that have been long simmering in the minds of many. This is well exemplified in the prohibition of marriage between certain first cousins as well as in the prohibition of marriage between parents and children. For many Australian tribes dislike and prohibit all marriages between first cousins, even though they have not incorporated that dislike and prohibition in their exogamous organization by adopting the eight-class system, which effectually prevents all such marriages.

The aversion, whether instinctive or acquired, to the forbidden marriages shows itself markedly in the customs of social avoidance which in many savage communities persons who stand in the prohibited degrees of kinship or affinity observe towards each

other; for the only reasonable explanation of such customs, which have been traced throughout most of the exogamous and totemic tribes of the world, is that they are precautions against unions which the people regard as incestuous. In some Australian tribes this custom of avoidance is observed between brothers and sisters, although brothers and sisters are universally barred to each other in marriage by all the exogamous systems, the two-class system, the four-class system, and the eight-class system alike. No doubt it is possible theoretically to explain this avoidance as merely an effect of the exogamous prohibition. But this explanation becomes improbable when we observe that similar customs of mutual avoidance are frequently observed towards each other by persons who are not barred to each other by the exogamous rules of the classes. For example, the custom that a man must avoid his wife's mother is observed in Australia by tribes which have female descent as well as by tribes which have male descent; yet in tribes which have two classes with female descent a woman always belongs to the same exogamous class as her daughter, and is therefore theoretically marriageable with her daughter's husband. Similarly with first cousins, the children of a brother and of a sister respectively, they are sometimes bound to avoid each other even although the exogamous system of the tribe interposes no barrier to their union. Hence it is a legitimate inference that in all such customs of mutual avoidance between persons who are sexually marriageable, but socially unmarriageable, with each other, we see rather the cause than the effect of exogamy, the germ of the institution rather than its fruit. That germ, if I am right, is a feeling of dread or aversion

to sexual union with certain persons, a feeling which has found legal or rather customary expression in the exogamous prohibitions. The remarkable fact that the custom of mutual avoidance is often observed between adult brothers and sisters and between parents and their adult children seems to tell strongly against the view of Dr. Westermarck, that sexual desire is not naturally excited between persons who have long lived together; for no classes of persons usually live longer together than brothers with their sisters and parents with their children; none, therefore, should be more perfectly exempt from the temptation to incest, none should be freer in their social intercourse with each other than brothers with sisters and parents with children. That freedom, indeed, exists among all civilized nations, but it does not exist among all savages, and the difference in this respect between the liberty granted to the nearest relations by civilization and the restrictions imposed on them by savagery certainly suggests that the impulse to incest, which is almost extinct in a higher state of society, is so far from being inoperative in a lower state of society that very stringent precautions are needed to repress it.

Thus the exogamous system of the Australian aborigines, forming a graduated series of restrictions on marriage which increase progressively with the complexity of the system as it advances from two through four to eight classes, appears to have been deliberately devised for the purpose of preventing sexual unions which the natives regarded as incestuous. The natural and almost inevitable inference is that before the first bisection of a community into two exogamous classes such incestuous unions between persons near of kin, especially between blood brothers

and sisters, were common; in short, that at some period before the rise of exogamy barriers between the sexes did not exist, or in other words there was sexual promiscuity. Under the influence of exogamy, which in one form or another is and probably has been for ages dominant in Australia, the period of sexual promiscuity belongs to a more or less distant past, but clear traces of it survive in the right of intercourse which in many Australian tribes the men exercise over the unmarried girls before these are handed over to their husbands. That the licence granted to men on these occasions is no mere outburst of savage lust but a relic of an ancient custom is strongly suggested by the methodical way in which the right is exercised by certain, not all, of the men of the tribe, who take their turn in a prescribed and strictly regulated order. Thus even these customs are by no means cases of absolutely unrestricted promiscuity, but taken together with the converging evidence of the series of exogamous classes they point decidedly to the former prevalence of far looser relations between the sexes than are now to be found among any of the Australian aborigines.

But it must always be borne in mind that, in postulating sexual promiscuity, or something like it, as the starting-point of the present Australian marriage system, we affirm nothing as to the absolutely primitive relations of the sexes among mankind. All that we can say is that the existing marriage customs of the Australian aborigines appear to have sprung from an immediately preceding stage of social evolution in which marriage, understood as a lasting union between single pairs, was either unknown or rare and exceptional, and in which even the nearest

relations were allowed to cohabit with each other. But, as I have already pointed out, though the Australian savages are primitive in a relative sense by comparison with ourselves, they are almost certainly very far indeed from being primitive in the absolute sense of the word; on the contrary, there is every reason to think that by comparison with truly primaeval man they have made immense progress in intelligence, morality, and the arts of life. Hence even if it could be proved that before they attained to their present level of culture they had passed through a lower stage in which marriage as we understand it hardly existed, we should have no right to infer that their still more remote ancestors had continued in a state of sexual promiscuity ever since man became man by a gradual evolution from a lower form of animal life. It is no doubt interesting to speculate on what may have been the relations of the human sexes to each other from the earliest times down to the period when savage man emerges on the stage of history; but such speculations are apparently destined to remain speculations for ever, incapable of demonstration or even of being raised to a high degree of probability.

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Thus the whole complex exogamous system of the Australian aborigines is explicable in a simple and natural way if we suppose that it sprang from a growing aversion to the marriage of near kin, beginning with the marriage of brothers with sisters and of parents with children, and ending at the marriage of cousins, who sometimes fell within and sometimes without the table of forbidden degrees. To prevent these marriages the tribes deliberately subdivided themselves into two, four, or eight exogamous

classes, the three systems succeeding each other in a series of growing complexity as each was found inadequate to meet the increasing demands of public opinion and morality. The scheme no doubt took shape in the minds of a few men of a sagacity and practical ability above the ordinary, who by their influence and authority persuaded their fellows to put it in practice; but at the same time the plan must have answered to certain general sentiments of what was right and proper, which had been springing up in the community long before a definite social organization was adopted to enforce them. And what is true of the origination of the system in its simplest form is doubtless true of each successive step which added at once to the complexity and to the efficiency of the curious machinery which savage wit had devised for the preservation of sexual morality. Thus, and thus only, does it seem possible to explain a social system at once so intricate, so regular, and so perfectly adapted to the needs and the opinions of the people who practise it. In the whole of history, as I have already remarked, it would hardly be possible to find another human institution on which the impress of deliberate thought and purpose has been stamped more plainly than on the exogamous systems of the Australian aborigines.

LI

EXOGAMY AND GROUP MARRIAGE[1]

Thus we may suppose that exogamy replaced a previous state of practically unrestricted sexual promiscuity. What the new system introduced was not

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. pp. 121-122.

individual marriage but group marriage; that is, it took away from all the men of the community the unlimited right of intercourse with all the women and obliged a certain group of men to confine themselves to a certain group of women. At first these groups were large, but they were reduced in size by each successive bisection of the tribe. The two-class system left every man free to cohabit, roughly speaking, with half the women of the community: the four-class system forbade him to have sexual relations with more than one-fourth of the women; and the eight-class system restricted him to one-eighth of the women. Thus each successive step in the exogamous progression erected a fresh barrier between the sexes; it was an advance from promiscuity through group marriage towards monogamy. Of this practice of group marriage, intermediate between the two extreme terms of the series, promiscuity on the one side and monogamy on the other, the most complete record is furnished by the classificatory system of relationship, which defines the relations of men and women to each other according to the particular generation and the particular exogamous class to which they belong. The cardinal relationship of the whole system is the marriageability of a group of men with a group of women. All the other relationships of the system hinge on this central one.

LII

THE NARROWING RING OF MARRIAGE[1]

But in dealing with aboriginal Australian society we are not left to infer the former prevalence of group

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i. pp. 124-125.

marriage from the classificatory system of relationship alone. A practice of group marriage actually prevails, or prevailed till lately, among many Australian tribes, especially in the dreary regions about Lake Eyre, where nature may almost be said to have exhausted her ingenuity in making the country uninhabitable, and where accordingly the aborigines, fully occupied in maintaining a bare struggle for existence, enjoyed none of those material advantages which are essential to intellectual and social progress. Naturally enough, therefore, the old custom of group marriage has lingered longest amongst these most backward tribes, who have retained exogamy in its simplest and oldest form, that of the two-class system. But even among them the marriage groups are by no means coincident with the exogamous classes; they are far narrower in extent, they are a still closer approximation to the custom of individual marriage, that is, to the marriage of one man with one woman or with several women, which is now the ordinary form of sexual union in the Australian tribes. Thus the history of exogamy may be compared to a series of concentric rings placed successively one within the other, each of lesser circumference than its predecessor and each consequently circumscribing within narrower bounds the freedom of the individuals whom it encloses. The outermost ring includes all the women of the tribe; the innermost ring includes one woman only. The first ring represents promiscuity; the last ring represents monogamy.

LIII

THE ORIGIN OF PROHIBITED DEGREES [1]

To sum up. The effect of the two-class system is to bar the marriage of brothers with sisters, but not in all cases the marriage of parents with children, nor the marriage of a man's children with his sister's children. The effect of the four-class system is to bar the marriage of brothers with sisters and of parents with children in every case, but not the marriage of a man's children with his sister's children. The effect of the eight-class system is to bar the marriage of brothers with sisters, of parents with children, and of a man's children with his sister's children. The result of each successive dichotomy is thus to strike out another class of relations from the list of persons with whom marriage may be contracted: it is to add one more to the list of prohibited degrees.

But is the effect which these successive segmentations actually produce the effect which they were intended to produce? I think we may safely conclude that it is. For the aborigines of Australia at the present day certainly entertain a deep horror of incest, that is, of just those marriages which the exogamous segmentations of the community are fitted to preclude [2];

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i. pp. 279-281.

[2] This does not, however, apply universally to cousin-marriage in Australia; for certain forms of cousin-marriage (namely the marriage of a man with the daughter of his mother's brother or of his father's sister), which are precluded by the eight-class system, are allowed or even preferred by some Australian tribes as by many peoples in other parts of the world. On the legitimacy or desirability of cousin-marriage the opinions of mankind seem to have diverged widely in all ages and all countries. I have discussed the subject at large elsewhere (*Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, ii. 98 *sqq.*). See below, pp. 172 *sqq.*

and down to recent times they commonly punished all such incestuous intercourse with death. It would therefore be perfectly natural that their ancestors should have taken the most stringent measures to prevent the commission of what they, like their descendants, probably regarded as a crime of the deepest dye and fraught with danger to society. Thus an adequate motive for the institution of their present marriage laws certainly exists among the Australian aborigines; and as these laws, in their combined complexity and regularity, have all the appearance of being artificial, it is legitimate to infer that they were devised by the natives for the purpose of achieving the very results which they do effectively achieve. Those who are best acquainted at first hand with the Australian savages believe them to be capable both of conceiving and of executing such social reforms as are implied in the institution of their present marriage system. We have no right to reject the deliberate opinion of the most competent authorities on such a point, especially when all the evidence at our disposal goes to confirm it. To dismiss as baseless an opinion so strongly supported is contrary to every sound principle of scientific research. It is to substitute the deductive for the inductive method; for it sets aside the evidence of first-hand observation in favour of our own abstract notions of probability. We civilized men who know savages only at second hand through the reports of others are bound to accept the well-weighed testimony of accurate and trustworthy observers as to the facts of savage life, whether that testimony agrees with our prepossessions or not. If we accept some of their statements and reject others according to an arbitrary standard of our own,

there is an end of scientific anthropology. We may then, if we please, erect a towering structure of hypothesis, which will perhaps hang together and look fair outwardly, but is rotten inwardly, because the premises on which it rests are false. In the present case the only ground for denying that the elaborate marriage system of the Australian aborigines has been devised by them for the purpose which it actually serves appears to be a preconceived idea that these savages are incapable of thinking out and putting in practice a series of checks and counter-checks on marriage so intricate that many civilized persons lack either the patience or the ability to understand them. Yet the institution which puzzles some European minds seems to create little or no difficulty for the intellect of the Australian savage. In his hands the complex and cumbrous machine works regularly and smoothly enough ; and this fact of itself should make us hesitate to affirm that he could not have invented an instrument which he uses so skilfully.

LIV

THE RELATION OF TOTEMISM AND EXOGAMY IN AUSTRALIA [1]

To complete our view of Australian exogamy it only remains to indicate the relation of the exogamous classes to the totemic clans, and to show how the exogamy of the clans came, under certain circumstances, to follow as a corollary from the exogamy of the classes, that is, primarily from the bisection of a community into two intermarrying groups. Among

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. pp. 127-132.

the Arunta and other tribes of Central Australia, whose totemic, though not their exogamous, system appears to be the most primitive, the totemic clans are not exogamous, and the reason why they are not exogamous is that these tribes have retained the truly primitive mode of determining a person's totem, not by the totem of his father or mother, but by the accident of the place where his mother imagined that the infant's spirit had passed into her womb. Such a mode of determining the totem, if it is rigorously observed, clearly prevents the totems from being hereditary and therefore renders them useless for the purposes of exogamy; since with conceptional totemism of this sort you cannot prevent, for example, a brother from cohabiting with a sister or a mother from cohabiting with her son by laying down a rule that no man shall cohabit with a woman of the same totem. For with conceptional totemism it may happen, and often does happen, that the brother's totem is different from the sister's totem and the mother's totem different from the son's totem. In such cases, therefore, an exogamous rule which forbids cohabitation between men and women of the same totem would be powerless to prevent the incest of a brother with a sister or the incest of a mother with her son. Accordingly the Arunta and other tribes of Central Australia, as well as the Banks' Islanders, who have retained the primitive system of conceptional totemism, have logically and rightly never applied the rule of exogamy to their totemic clans, because they saw, what indeed was obvious, that its application to them would not effect the object which exogamy was instituted to effect, to wit, the prevention of the marriage of near kin. Thus the omission of these tribes to

apply the rule of exogamy to their totemic clans, while they strictly applied it to the classes, not only indicates in the clearest manner the sharp distinction which we must draw between the exogamous classes and the totemic clans, but also furnishes a strong argument in favour of the view that exogamy was instituted for no other purpose than to prevent the marriage of near kin, since it was strictly applied to those social divisions which effected that purpose, and was not applied at all to those social divisions which could not possibly effect it.

From this it follows that amongst the Arunta and other tribes of Central Australia exogamy was introduced before the totems had become hereditary. Was it so in the other Australian tribes? It is not necessary to suppose so. We may imagine that people took their totems regularly from either their father or their mother before the introduction of exogamy, that is, while persons of the same totem were still free to cohabit with each other. If, then, exogamy in its simplest form of a two-class system were instituted in a community which up to that time had consisted of a number of hereditary totemic, but not exogamous, clans, it is easy to see that the exogamy of the totemic clans would be a natural, though not a necessary, consequence. For an obvious way of drawing the new exogamous line through the community would be to divide up the hereditary totemic clans between the two exogamous classes, placing so many clans on one side of the line to form the one class, and so many clans on the other side of the line to form the other class. In this way, given the exogamy of the two classes and the heredity of the totemic clans, the clans were henceforth exogamous; no man in future might marry a

woman of his own clan or a woman of any clan in his own class; he might only marry a woman of one of the clans in the other class. Thus it is quite possible that in all the Australian tribes in which the totemic clans are now exogamous, they have been so from the very introduction of exogamy, though not of course before it.

On the other hand, the circumstance that many tribes in the secluded centre of the Australian continent have retained the primitive system of conceptional totemism along with the comparatively new custom of exogamy, suggests that everywhere in Australia the exogamous revolution may have been inaugurated in communities which in like manner had not yet advanced from conceptional to hereditary totemism. And there is the more reason to think so because the tribes which lie somewhat farther from the Centre and nearer to the sea are at the present day still in a state of transition from conceptional to hereditary totemism. Amongst them the theory which bridges over the gap between the two systems is that, while the mother is still supposed to conceive in the old way by the entrance of a spirit child into her, none but a spirit of the father's totem will dare to take up its abode in his wife. In this way the old conceptional theory of totemism is preserved and combined with the new principle of heredity: the child is still born in the ancient fashion, but it now invariably takes its father's totem. An analogous theory, it is obvious, might be invented to reconcile conceptional totemism with a rule that a child always takes its mother's totem rather than its father's. Thus, given an original system of conceptional totemism, it is capable of developing, consistently with its prin-

ciples, into hereditary totemism either with paternal or with maternal descent. But given an original system of hereditary totemism it seems impossible to explain in any probable manner how it could have developed into conceptional and non-hereditary totemism such as we find it among the Arunta and other tribes of Central Australia. This is surely a very strong reason for regarding conceptional totemism as primary or original, and hereditary totemism as secondary or derivative.

On the whole, then, I incline to believe that when exogamy was first instituted in Australia the natives were still divided into totemic clans like those of the Arunta in which the totems had not yet become hereditary; that is, in which every person derived his totem from the accident of his mother's fancy when she first felt her womb quickened. The transition from this conceptional to hereditary totemism would then be gradual, not sudden. From habitually cohabiting with a certain woman a man would come to desire that the children to whom she gave birth and whom, though he did not know they were his offspring, he helped to guard and to feed, should have his totem and so should belong to his totemic clan. For that purpose he might easily put pressure on his wife, forbidding her to go near spots where she might conceive spirits of any totems but his own. If such feelings were general among the men of a tribe, a custom of inheriting the totem from the father might become first common and then universal; when it was complete, the transition from purely conceptional totemism to purely hereditary totemism in the male line would be complete also. On the other hand, if it was the mother who particularly desired that her children

should take her totem and belong to her totemic clan, the transition from conceptional totemism to hereditary totemism in the female line would have been equally facile, indeed much more so ; for seeing that under the conceptional system a child's totem is always determined by the mother's fancy or, to be more exact, by her statement as to her fancy, it would be easy for her either to frequent places haunted by spirits of her own totem alone, in order to receive one of them into her womb, or at all events, if she were unscrupulous, to fib that she had done so, and in this way to satisfy the longing of her mother's heart by getting children of her own totem. That may perhaps be one, and not the least influential, cause why among primitive totemic tribes the totem oftener descends in the maternal than in the paternal line.

While exogamy in the form of group marriage may thus have started either with female or with male descent, in other words, either with mother-kin or with father-kin, there are many causes which would tend in course of time to give a preference to male descent or father-kin over female descent or mother-kin. Amongst these causes the principal would probably be the gradual restriction of group marriage within narrower and narrower limits and with it the greater certainty of individual fatherhood ; for it is to be remembered that although exogamy appears to have been instituted at a time when the nature of physical paternity was unknown, most tribes which still observe the institution are now, and probably have long been, acquainted with the part which the father plays in the begetting of offspring. Even in South-Eastern Australia, where, favoured by a fine climate and ample supplies of food, the aborigines

had made the greatest material and intellectual progress, the fact of physical paternity was clearly recognized, though it is still unknown to the ruder tribes of the Centre and the North. And with the knowledge of the blood tie which unites a man to his children, it is obvious that his wish to draw them closer to himself socially would also naturally be strengthened. Thus, whereas the system of father-kin, once established, is perfectly stable, being never exchanged for mother-kin, the system of mother-kin, on the other hand, is unstable, being constantly liable to be exchanged for father-kin. The chief agency in effecting the transition from mother-kin to father-kin would appear to have been a general increase in material prosperity bringing with it a large accession of private property to individuals. For it is when a man has much to bequeath to his heirs that he becomes sensible of the natural inequity, as it now appears to him, of a system of kinship which obliges him to transmit all his goods to his sisters' children and none to his own. Hence it is with the great development of private property that devices for shifting descent from the female to the male line most commonly originate. Amongst these devices are the practice of making presents to a man's own children in his lifetime, in order that when he dies there may be little or nothing to go to his sisters' children; the practice of buying his wife and with her the children from her family, so that henceforth the father is the owner as well as the begetter of his offspring; and the practice of naming children into their father's clan instead of into their mother's. Examples of all these methods of shifting the line of descent from the female to the male line are on record

in various parts of the world, and no doubt they might easily be multiplied. Hence, wherever we find a tribe wavering between female descent and male descent we may be sure that it is in the act of passing from mother-kin to father-kin, and not in the reverse direction, since there are many motives which induce men to exchange mother-kin for father-kin, but none which induce them to exchange father-kin for mother-kin. If in Australia there is little or no evidence of a transition from maternal to paternal descent, the reason is probably to be found in the extreme poverty of the Australian aborigines, who, having hardly any property to bequeath to their heirs, were not very solicitous as to who their heirs should be.

Thus the whole apparently intricate, obscure, and confused system of aboriginal Australian marriage and relationship can be readily and simply explained on the two principles of conceptional totemism and the division of a community into two exogamous classes for the sake of preventing the marriage of near kin. Given these two principles as starting-points, and granted that totemism preceded exogamy, we see that the apparent intricacy, obscurity, and confusion of the system vanish like clouds and are replaced by a clear, orderly, and logical evolution. On any other principles, so far as I can perceive, the attempt to explain Australian totemism and exogamy only darkens darkness and confounds confusion.

LV

THE ALTERNATIVE OF FATHER-KIN OR MOTHER-KIN [1]

In what precedes I have assumed that when a community first divided itself into two exogamous classes the children were assigned to the class of their mother, in other words, that descent was traced in the female line. One obvious reason for preferring female to male descent would be the certainty and the permanence of the blood relationship between a mother and her child compared with the uncertainty and frequently the impermanence of the social relationship between a man and the children of the woman with whom he cohabited; for in speaking of these early times we must always bear in mind that the physical relationship of a father to his children was not yet recognized, and that he was to them no more than their guardian and the consort of their mother. Another strong reason, which indeed flows as a consequence from the preceding reason, for preferring female to male descent in the original two-class system of exogamy was that the aversion to incest with a mother was probably much older and more deeply rooted than the aversion to incest with a daughter, and that, while a two-class system with female descent bars incest with a mother, a two-class system with male descent does not do so; for whereas a two-class system with female descent puts a mother and her son in the same exogamous class and thereby prevents their sexual union, a two-class system with

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. pp. 125-127.

male descent puts mother and son in different exogamous classes and therefore presents no barrier to their sexual union. For these reasons it seems probable that when exogamy was first instituted most people adopted maternal rather than paternal descent of the exogamous classes.

But it need not necessarily have been so. With group marriage it is as easy to trace group fatherhood as group motherhood, since the group of fathers is just as well known as the group of mothers, though the individual father may be unknown. It is therefore perfectly possible that in instituting exogamy some tribes from the beginning preferred to assign children to the group of their fathers instead of to the group of their mothers. Of course such an assignation would not imply any recognition of physical paternity, the nature and even existence of which were most probably quite unknown to the founders of exogamy. All that these primitive savages understood by a father of children was a man who cohabited with the children's mother and acted as guardian of the family. That cohabitation, whether occasional or prolonged, would be a fact as familiar, or nearly as familiar, to every member of the community as the fact of the woman's motherhood; and though nobody thought of connecting the cohabitation with the motherhood as cause and effect, yet the mere association of the man with the woman gave him an interest in her children, and the more prolonged the association, in other words, the more permanent the marriage, the greater would be the interest he would take in them. The children were obviously a part of the woman's body; and if from long possession he came to regard the woman as his property, he would naturally be led to regard her

children as his property also. In fact, as I have already suggested, we may conjecture that a man looked on his wife's children as his chattels long before he knew them to be his offspring. Thus in primitive society it is probable that fatherhood was viewed as a social, not a physical, relationship of a man to his children. But that social relationship may quite well have been considered a sufficient reason for assigning children to the class of the man who had the right of cohabiting with their mother rather than to the class of the mother herself. Hence we cannot safely assume that Australian communities, such as the Arunta and other Central tribes, who now transmit their exogamous classes in the paternal line, ever transmitted them in the maternal line. So far as exogamy is concerned, father-kin may be as primitive as mother-kin.

LVI

THE DREAM OF GYNAECOCRACY [1]

The ancient and widespread custom of tracing descent and inheriting property through the mother alone does not by any means imply that the government of the tribes which observe the custom is in the hands of women; in short, it should always be borne in mind that mother-kin does not mean mother-rule. On the contrary, the practice of mother-kin prevails most extensively amongst the lowest savages, with whom woman, instead of being the ruler of man, is always his drudge and often little better than his slave. Indeed, so far is the system from implying any social superiority of women that it probably took its rise from what

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part IV. *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, vol. ii. pp. 209-212.

we should regard as their deepest degradation, to wit, from a state of society in which the relations of the sexes were so loose and vague that children could not be fathered on any particular man.

When we pass from the purely savage state to that higher plane of culture in which the accumulation of property, and especially of landed property, has become a powerful instrument of social and political influence, we naturally find that wherever the ancient preference for the female line of descent has been retained, it tends to increase the importance and enhance the dignity of woman; and her aggrandizement is most marked in princely families, where she either herself holds royal authority as well as private property, or at least transmits them both to her consort or her children. But this social advance of women has never been carried so far as to place men as a whole in a position of political subordination to them. Even where the system of mother-kin in regard to descent and property has prevailed most fully, the actual government has generally, if not invariably, remained in the hands of men. Exceptions have no doubt occurred; women have occasionally arisen who by sheer force of character have swayed for a time the destinies of their people. But such exceptions are rare and their effects transitory; they do not affect the truth of the general rule that human society has been governed in the past and, human nature remaining the same, is likely to be governed in the future, mainly by masculine force and masculine intelligence.

The theory of a gynaecocracy is in truth a dream of visionaries and pedants. And equally chimerical is the idea that the predominance of goddesses under

a system of mother-kin like that of the Khasis is a creation of the female mind. If women ever created gods, they would be more likely to give them masculine than feminine features. In point of fact the great religious ideals which have permanently impressed themselves on the world seem always to have been a product of the male imagination. Men make gods and women worship them. The combination of ancestor-worship with mother-kin furnishes a simple and sufficient explanation of the superiority of goddesses over gods in a state of society where these conditions prevail. Men naturally assign the first place in their devotions to the ancestress from whom they trace their descent. We need not resort to a fantastic hypothesis of the preponderance of the feminine fancy in order to account for the facts.

The theory that under a system of mother-kin the women rule the men and set up goddesses for them to worship is indeed so improbable in itself, and so contrary to experience, that it scarcely deserves the serious attention which it appears to have received. But when we have brushed aside these cobwebs, as we must do, we are still left face to face with the solid fact of the wide prevalence of mother-kin, that is, of a social system which traces descent and transmits property through women and not through men. That a social system so widely spread and so deeply rooted should have affected the religion of the peoples who practise it, may reasonably be inferred, especially when we remember that in primitive communities the social relations of the gods commonly reflect the social relations of their worshippers.

LVII

THE PROBLEM OF EXOGAMY, A GENERAL SOLUTION [1]

Having found, as it seems, an adequate explanation of the growth, though not of the ultimate origin, of exogamy in aboriginal Australia, we naturally ask whether a similar explanation can account for the growth of exogamy in all the other parts of the world where it is practised. The germ of the whole institution, if I am right, is the deliberate bisection of the whole community into two exogamous classes for the purpose of preventing the sexual unions of near kin. Accordingly on this hypothesis we should expect to find such a bisection or traces of it in all exogamous tribes. The facts, however, do not by any means altogether answer to that expectation. It is true that a division into two exogamous classes, in other words, a two-class system, exists commonly, though not universally, in Melanesia and is found among some tribes of North American Indians, such as the Iroquois, the Tlingits, the Haidas, and the Kenais. But the existence of two and only two exogamous divisions in a community is rare and exceptional. Usually we find not two exogamous classes but many exogamous clans, as appears to be the invariable rule among the numerous totemic peoples of India and Africa. But is it not possible that in some communities these exogamous and totemic clans may once have been grouped in exogamous classes or phratries which afterwards disappeared, leaving behind them nothing but the

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. pp. 132-137.

exogamy of the totemic clans, in other words, the prohibition of marriage between men and women of the same totemic clans? This is not only possible; it appears to have actually happened in totemic communities widely separated from each other. Thus in the Western Islands of Torres Straits there is reason to think that the totemic clans were formerly grouped in two exogamous classes or phratries, but that the exogamy of the classes has been relaxed while the exogamy of the totemic clans has been retained. Careful inquiry led Dr. Seligman to the conclusion that the same thing has happened among the Mekeo people and the Wagawaga people of New Guinea. In North America the very same change is known to have taken place among the Iroquois, as we learn from the high authority of L. H. Morgan, who lived among them for long and knew them intimately. Formerly, he says, the Iroquois were divided into two exogamous classes or phratries, each comprising four totemic clans, and no man might marry a woman in any of the four clans of his own class or phratry without incurring the deepest detestation and disgrace. In process of time, however, he tells us, the rigour of the system was relaxed, until finally the prohibition of marriage was confined only to the totemic clan. Again, precisely the same change is reported to have taken place among the Hurons or Wyandots. Our best authority on the tribe, Mr. W. E. Connolly, informs us that formerly the Wyandots were divided into two exogamous classes or phratries, one of which comprised four and the other seven totemic clans. In old times marriage was forbidden within the class or phratry as well as within the totemic clan, for the clans grouped together in a class or phratry were regarded as brothers to each

other, whereas they were only cousins to the clans of the other class or phratry. But at a later time the rule prohibiting marriage within the class was abolished and the prohibition was restricted to the totemic clan ; in other words, the clan continued to be exogamous after the class had ceased to be so. On the other side of America the same change would seem to have taken place among the Kenais of Alaska, though our information as to that tribe is not full and precise enough to allow us to speak with confidence.

These facts show that in tribes which have two exogamous classes, each class comprising a number of totemic clans, there is a tendency for the exogamy of the class to be dropped and the exogamy of the clan to be retained. An obvious motive for such a change is to be found in the far heavier burden which the exogamous class imposes on those who submit to it. For where a community is divided into two exogamous classes every man is thereby forbidden to marry, roughly speaking, one half of all the women of the community. In small communities—and in savage society the community is generally small—such a rule must often make it very difficult for a man to obtain a wife at all ; accordingly there would be a strong temptation to relax the burdensome exogamous rule of the class and to retain the far easier exogamous rule of the clan. The relief afforded by such a relaxation would be immediate, and it would be all the greater in proportion to the number of the totemic clans. If there were, let us say, twenty totemic clans, then, instead of being excluded from marriage with ten of them by the severe rule of class exogamy, a man would now be excluded from marriage with only one of them by

the mild rule of clan exogamy. The temptation thus offered to tribes hard put to it for wives must often have proved irresistible. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that many tribes, besides the Western Islanders of Torres Straits, the Iroquois, and the Wyandots, have tacitly or formally abolished the exogamy of the class, while they satisfied their scruples by continuing to observe the exogamy of the clan. In doing so they would exchange a heavy for a light matrimonial yoke.

The foregoing considerations suggest that everywhere the exogamy of the totemic clan may have been preceded by exogamy of the class or phratry, even where no trace of a two-class system has survived; in short, we may perhaps draw the conclusion that exogamy of the totemic clans is always exogamy in decay, since the restrictions which it imposes on marriage are far less sweeping than the restrictions imposed by the exogamy of the classes or phratries.

But there is another strong and quite independent reason for thinking that many tribes which now know only the exogamy of the totemic clans formerly distributed these totemic clans into two exogamous classes. For wherever the system of relationship of a totemic people has been ascertained, it has been found to be classificatory, not descriptive, in its nature. To that rule there appears to be no exception. Now the classificatory system of relationship, as we shall see presently,[1] follows naturally and necessarily as a corollary from the system of group marriage created by the distribution of a community into two exogamous classes. Hence we may infer with some degree of probability that, wherever the classificatory

[1] See below, pp. 153 *sqq.*, 156 *sqq.*

system now exists, a two-class system of exogamy existed before. If that is so, then exogamy would seem everywhere to have originated as in Australia through a deliberate bisection of the community into two exogamous classes for the purpose of preventing the marriage of near kin, especially the marriage of brothers with sisters and of mothers with sons.

An advantage of adopting this as a general solution of the whole problem of exogamy is that, like the solution of the problem of totemism which I have adopted, it enables us to understand how the institution is found so widely distributed over the globe without obliging us to assume either that it has been borrowed by one distant race from another, or that it has been transmitted by inheritance from the common ancestors of races so diverse and remote from each other as the Australian aborigines, the Dravidians of India, the negro and Bantu peoples of Africa, and the Indians of North America. Institutions so primitive and so widespread as totemism and exogamy are explained more easily and naturally by the hypothesis of independent origin in many places than by the hypothesis either of borrowing or of inheritance from primaeval ancestors. But to explain the wide diffusion of any such institution, with any appearance of probability, on the hypothesis of many separate origins, we must be able to point to certain simple general ideas which naturally suggest themselves to savage men, and we must be able to indicate some easy and obvious way in which these ideas might find expression in practice. A theory which requires us to assume that a highly complex process of evolution has been repeated independently by many races in many lands condemns itself at the

outset. If a custom has sprung up independently in a multitude of savage tribes all over the globe, it is probable that it has originated in some idea which to the savage mind appears very simple and obvious. Such a simple idea we have found for totemism in the belief that women can be impregnated without the aid of the other sex by animals, plants, and other material objects, which enter into them and are born from them with the nature of the animals, plants, or other material objects, though with the illusory appearance of human beings. Such a simple idea we have found for exogamy in the dislike of the cohabitation of brothers with sisters and of mothers with sons, and we have seen how this dislike might easily find expression in the distribution of a community into two exogamous classes with female descent, which effectually prevents all such cohabitations. The hypothesis has at least the merit of simplicity which, as I have just said, is indispensable to any theory which professes to explain the independent origin in many places of a widespread institution.

LVIII

ANALOGY OF EXOGAMY AND SCIENTIFIC BREEDING [1]

If we compare the principles of exogamy with the principles of scientific breeding we can scarcely fail to be struck, as Mr. Walter Heape has pointed out, by the curious resemblance, amounting almost to coincidence, between the two.

In the first place, under exogamy the beneficial

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. pp. 166-169.

effects of crossing, which the highest authorities deem essential to the welfare and even to the existence of species of animals and plants, is secured by the system of exogamous classes, either two, four, or eight in number, which we have seen every reason to regard as artificially instituted for the express purpose of preventing the cohabitation of the nearest blood relations. Now it is very remarkable that the particular form of incest which the oldest form of exogamy, the two-class system, specially prevents is the incest of brothers with sisters. That system absolutely prevents all such incest, while it only partially prevents the incest of parents with children, which to the civilized mind might seem more shocking on account of the difference between the generations, as well as for other reasons. Yet this determination of savage man to stop the cohabitation of brothers with sisters even before stopping the cohabitation of parents with children is in accordance with the soundest biological principles; for it is well recognized both by practical breeders and scientific men that the sexual union of brothers with sisters is the closest and most injurious form of incest, more so than the sexual union of a mother with a son or of a father with a daughter. The complete prohibition of incest between parents and children was effected by the second form of exogamy, the four-class system. Lastly, the prohibition of marriage between all first cousins, about which opinion has wavered down to the present time even in civilized countries, was only accomplished by the third and latest form of exogamy, the eight-class system, which was naturally adopted only by such tribes as disapproved of these marriages, but never by tribes who viewed the union of certain

first cousins either with indifference or with positive approbation.

Nor does this exhaust the analogies between exogamy and scientific breeding. The rule of the deterioration and especially of the infertility of inbred animals is subject to a very important exception. While the evil can be removed by an infusion of fresh blood, it can also be remedied in an entirely different way by simply changing the conditions of life, especially by sending some animals to a distance and then bringing their progeny back to unite with members of the family which have remained in the old home. Such a form of local exogamy, as we may call it, without the introduction of any fresh blood, appears to be effective in regenerating the stock and restoring its lost fertility. But this system of local exogamy, this marriage of members of the same race who have lived at a distance from each other, is also practised by many savage tribes besides or instead of their system of kinship exogamy. It is often a rule with them that they must get their wives not merely from another stock but from another district. For example, the Warramunga tribe of Central Australia is divided into two intermarrying classes which occupy separate districts, a northern and a southern, with the rule that the northern men must always marry wives from the southern district, and that reciprocally all the southern men must marry wives from the northern district. Indeed, there are some grounds for conjecturing that the custom of locally separating the exogamous classes may have been adopted at the very outset for the sake of sundering those persons whose sexual union was deemed a danger to the community. It might be

hard to devise a marriage system more in accordance with sound biological principles.

Thus exogamy, especially in the form in which it is practised by the lowest of existing savages, the aborigines of Australia, presents a curious analogy to a system of scientific breeding. That the exogamous system of these primitive people was artificial, and that it was deliberately devised by them for the purpose which it actually serves, namely the prevention of the marriage of near kin, seems quite certain ; on no other reasonable hypothesis can we explain its complex arrangements, so perfectly adapted to the wants and the ideas of the natives. Yet it is impossible to suppose that in planning it these ignorant and improvident savages could have been animated by exact knowledge of its consequences or by a far-seeing care for the future welfare of their remote descendants. When we reflect how little to this day marriage is regulated by any such considerations even among the most enlightened classes in the most civilized communities, we shall not be likely to attribute a far higher degree of knowledge, foresight, and self-command to the rude founders of exogamy. What idea these primitive sages and lawgivers, if we may call them so, had in their minds when they laid down the fundamental lines of the institution, we cannot say with certainty ; all that we know of savages leads us to suppose that it must have been what we should now call a superstition, some crude notion of natural causation which to us might seem transparently false, though to them it doubtless seemed obviously true. Yet egregiously wrong as they were in theory, they appear to have been fundamentally right in practice. What they abhorred was really evil ; what they pre-

ferred was really good. Perhaps we may call their curious system an unconscious mimicry of science. The end which it accomplished was wise, though the thoughts of the men who invented it were foolish. In acting as they did, these poor savages blindly obeyed the impulse of the great evolutionary forces which in the physical world are constantly educing higher out of lower forms of existence and in the moral world civilization out of savagery. If that is so, exogamy has been an instrument in the hands of that unknown power, the masked wizard of history, who by some mysterious process, some subtle alchemy, so often transmutes in the crucible of suffering the dross of folly and evil into the fine gold of wisdom and good.

LIX

THE AVOIDANCE OF NEAR RELATIONS [1]

In Northern Melanesia, among the natives of Central New Ireland, marriage between a mother and her son is excluded by the law of class exogamy with maternal descent, because mother and son belong to the same class and totem. Further, marriage between a brother and sister is excluded for the same reason, because both belong to the same class and totem. Further, marriage between cousins who are children of two brothers is excluded, for the same reason, because the children are of the same class and totem. Further, marriage between cousins who are children of two sisters is excluded for the same reason, because the children are of the same class and totem. But on the other hand the law of class-exogamy does

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. ii. pp. 130-131; vol. i. p. 503; vol. ii. pp. 76-79.

not, with maternal descent of the classes, exclude the marriage of a father with his daughter, because he and she always belong to different classes and totems ; nor does it exclude the marriage of cousins who are the children of a brother and of a sister respectively, because such cousins always belong to different classes and totems. Yet both such marriages, though not forbidden by the law of class-exogamy, are most rigidly forbidden by custom. The penalty for incest with a daughter is death by hanging. Cousins who are the children of a brother and a sister respectively not only may not marry each other, they may not approach each other, they may not shake hands or even touch each other, they may not give each other presents, they may not mention each other's names. But they are allowed to speak to each other at a distance of some paces.

There can be no doubt that this mutual avoidance of cousins who are forbidden by custom, though not by the class-law, to marry each other is a precaution to prevent the violation of the custom ; whether it has been instituted deliberately or grown up instinctively, its effect is to raise an artificial barrier between the forbidden persons and so far to deliver them from temptation. Now similar rules of avoidance are observed not only between such cousins but also between brother and sister, although brother and sister, being always of the same class and totem, are forbidden by the law of class-exogamy to marry each other. There is a mutual shyness or shame between them. They may not come near each other, they may not shake hands, they may not touch each other, they may not give each other presents ; but they are allowed to speak to each other at a distance of some paces. The penalty

for incest with a sister, like that for incest with a daughter, is death by hanging. We can therefore scarcely doubt that the mutual avoidance of brother and sister has been either instituted deliberately or grown up instinctively as a precaution against incest between them; sexual intercourse between a brother and sister is apparently viewed as a crime so serious, that the ordinary rule of exogamy is not a sufficient safeguard against it, but must be reinforced by other and stringent measures. In Southern Melanesia, as we shall see immediately, the same mutual avoidance of brother and sister exists and is to be explained in the same way.

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Among the Kurnai of Gippsland, in Australia, "the curious custom," says Dr. Howitt, "in accordance with which the man was prohibited from speaking to, or having any communication or dealings with, his wife's mother, is one of extraordinary strength, and seems to be rooted deep down in their very nature. So far as I know it is of widespread occurrence throughout Australia." Dr. Howitt mentions a Kurnai man of his acquaintance, who was a member of the Church of England, but who nevertheless positively refused to speak to his mother-in-law and reproached Dr. Howitt for expecting him to commit so gross a breach of good manners. The most probable explanation of this singular rule of avoidance appears to be the one which Dr. Howitt has suggested, namely, that it is intended to prevent the possibility of that marriage with a mother-in-law which, while it was repugnant to the feelings of the native, was yet not barred by the old two-class system with maternal descent. This view is not indeed free from

difficulties, but on the whole it seems open to fewer objections than any other explanation that has yet been put forward.

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The two-class system with maternal descent, which prevails also in Southern Melanesia (the Banks' Islands and the Northern New Hebrides), permits a man to marry his mother-in-law, since she necessarily belongs to the same exogamous class as his wife; but custom strictly interdicts such marriages. Not only does it forbid them to marry, but as usual it also forbids them to hold ordinary social intercourse with each other. In the Banks' Islands these rules of avoidance and reserve are very strict and minute. A man will not come near his wife's mother, and she will not come near him. If the two chance to meet in a path, the woman will step out of it and stand with her back turned till he has gone by, or perhaps, if it be more convenient, he will move out of the way. At Vanua Lava, in Port Patteson, a man would not even follow his mother-in-law along the beach until the rising tide had washed her footprints from the sand. . . .

That all such customs of mutual avoidance between a man and his wife's mother originated in an instinctive feeling that they ought not to marry each other though the class system permitted them to do so, was, as we have seen, the view of Dr. A. W. Howitt, and it is by far the most probable explanation of the custom that has yet been propounded. So far as the people of the Banks' Islands and the Northern New Hebrides are concerned, the theory is confirmed by the parallel rules of avoidance which are observed among them, on the one hand between a mother

and her sons, and on the other hand between brothers and sisters. Thus in Lepers' Island, one of the New Hebrides, when a boy has reached a certain age he no longer lives at home, as he had hitherto done, but takes up his quarters in the club-house (*gamali*), where he now regularly eats and sleeps. "And now begins his strange and strict reserve of intercourse with his sisters and his mother. This begins in full force towards his sisters; he must not use as a common noun the word which is the name or makes part of the name of any of them, and they avoid his name as carefully. He may go to his father's house to ask for food, but if his sister is within he has to go away before he eats; if no sister is there he can sit down near the door and eat. If by chance brother and sister meet in the path she runs away or hides. If a boy on the sands knows that certain footsteps are his sister's, he will not follow them, nor will she his. This mutual avoidance begins when the boy is clothed or the girl tatooed. The partition between boys and girls without which a school cannot be carried on is not there to divide the sexes generally, but to separate brothers and sisters. This avoidance continues through life. The reserve between son and mother increases as the boy grows up, and is much more on her side than his. He goes to the house and asks for food; his mother brings it out but does not give it him, she puts it down for him to take; if she calls him to come she speaks to him in the plural, in a more distant manner; 'Come ye,' she says, *mim vanai*, not 'Come thou.' If they talk together she sits at a little distance and turns away, for she is shy of her grown-up son. The meaning of all this is obvious."

In fact, as Dr. Codrington here implies, such rules of avoidance seem only explicable on the hypothesis that they originate in a horror of sexual intercourse between a brother and a sister or between a mother and her son, a horror which has led the people consciously or unconsciously to remove as far as possible all temptations to such incest by socially dividing brothers from their sisters and mothers from their sons. The difference between these cases and the avoidance of a man and his mother-in-law is that, whereas under the two-class system with maternal descent a man and his mother-in-law belong to different exogamous classes and are therefore theoretically marriageable, brothers and sisters, mothers and sons belong to the same exogamous class and are therefore not even theoretically marriageable to each other. The reason why the custom of avoidance is still observed between brothers and sisters, mothers and sons, though they are already excluded from each other by the rule of class exogamy, may be a feeling that incest with a sister or a mother is a crime so great that the rule of class exogamy is an insufficient safeguard against it, and that it needs to be reinforced by other rules or customs which deepen and widen the gulf between these near relations. If most peoples, both barbarous and civilized, who share the horror at such unions, nevertheless place no social obstacles between brothers and sisters, between mothers and their sons, the reason may be that by inheritance through many generations the abstention from incest with sisters and mothers has become so habitual and instinctive in all normally constituted persons that the external barriers which were once placed between brothers and sisters, between mothers and sons, have

grown superfluous and so have gradually fallen away of themselves. The widespread custom of lodging the young unmarried men in houses apart from their families may have been one of these artificial barriers ; it may have been adopted for the purpose of preventing a dangerous intimacy between the youths and their mothers and sisters. At least the Melanesian practice described by Dr. Codrington points in this direction ; for the marked avoidance of a youth by his mother and sisters begins just at the time when he becomes sexually dangerous, and when, therefore, he is banished from the home to sleep with other males in the public club-house. Such club-houses, where the unmarried men lodge away from their families, are common in New Guinea, Melanesia, and other parts of the world.

LX

THE ORIGIN OF AVERSION TO INCEST UNKNOWN [1]

It appears highly probable that the aversion which most civilized races have entertained to incest or the marriage of near kin has been derived by them through a long series of ages from their savage ancestors ; for there is no evidence or probability that the aversion is a thing of recent growth, a product of advanced civilization. Even, therefore, though the primitive forefathers of the Semites and the Aryans may have known nothing either of totemism or of exogamy, we may with some confidence assume that they disapproved of incest, and that their disapprobation has been inherited by their descendants

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. pp. 153-155.

to this day. Thus the abhorrence of incest, which is the essence of exogamy, goes back in the history of mankind to a period of very rude savagery; and we may fairly suppose that, whether it has been embodied in a system of exogamy or not, it has everywhere originated in the same primitive modes of thought and feeling. What, then, are the primitive modes of thought and feeling which gave rise to the abhorrence of incest? Why, in other words, did rude and ignorant savages come to regard with strong disapprobation the cohabitation of brothers with sisters and of parents with children? We do not know and it is difficult even to guess. None of the answers yet given to these questions appears to be satisfactory. It cannot have been that primitive savages forbade incest because they perceived it to be injurious to the offspring; for down to our own time the opinions of scientific men have differed on the question whether the closest inbreeding, in other words, the highest degree of incest, is injurious or not to the progeny. "The evil results from close interbreeding," says Darwin, "are difficult to detect, for they accumulate slowly, and differ much in degree with different species, whilst the good effects which almost invariably follow a cross are from the first manifest"; and it may be added that the evil effects of inbreeding, if they exist, are necessarily more difficult to detect in man than in most other species of animals because mankind breeds so slowly. With quick-breeding animals like fowls, where the generations follow each other in rapid succession, it is possible to observe the good or ill effects of inbreeding and outbreeding in a short time. But with the human race, even if we were perfectly free to make experiments in breeding,

many years would necessarily elapse before the effect of these experiments would be clearly manifested. Accordingly we cannot suppose that any harmful consequences of inbreeding have been observed by savages and have provided them with the motive for instituting exogamy. All that we know of the ignorance and improvidence of savages confirms the observation of Darwin that they "are not likely to reflect on distant evils to their progeny". Indeed, the improbability that primitive man should have regulated the relations of the sexes by elaborate rules intended to avert the evil effects of inbreeding on the offspring has been greatly increased, since Darwin wrote, by the remarkable discovery that some of the most primitive of existing races, who observe the strictest of all systems of exogamy, are entirely ignorant of the causal relation which exists between the intercourse of the sexes and the birth of offspring. The ignorance which thus characterizes these backward tribes was no doubt at one time universal amongst mankind and must have been shared by the savage founders of exogamy. But if they did not know that children are the fruit of marriage, it is difficult to see how they could have instituted an elaborate system of marriage for the express purpose of benefiting the children. In short, the idea that the abhorrence of incest originally sprang from an observation of its injurious effects on the offspring may safely be dismissed as baseless.

LXI

A CONJECTURE AS TO THE ORIGIN OF THE AVERSION TO INCEST [1]

But if the founders of exogamy did not believe that the cohabitation of the nearest blood relations is detrimental to the progeny, can they have believed that it is detrimental to the parents themselves; in other words, can they have thought that the mere act of sexual intercourse with a near relative is in itself, quite apart from any social consequences or moral sentiments, physically injurious to one or both of the actors? I formerly thought that this may have been so and was accordingly inclined to look for the ultimate origin of exogamy or the prohibition of incest in a superstition of this sort, a baseless fear that incest was of itself injurious to the incestuous couple. But there are serious and indeed, as it now seems to me, conclusive objections to this view. For in the first place there is very little evidence that savages conceive the sexual intercourse of near kin to be harmful to the persons who engage in it.[2] Had the dread of harm caused by incestuous unions to the parties themselves been the origin of exogamy, it seems probable that the dread would have been peculiarly deep and

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. pp. 155-160.

[2] Indeed, certain peoples, who normally forbid incest, actually enjoin incest with a sister or a daughter as a means of obtaining good luck in certain undertakings, such as hunting, fishing, and war. See Gabriel Ferrand, *Les Musulmans à Madagascar et aux Îles Comores*, Deuxième Partie (Paris, 1893), pp. 20 *sq.*; A. van Gennep, *Tabou et Totemisme à Madagascar* (Paris, 1904), pp. 342 *sq.*; H. A. Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe* (Neuchâtel, 1912–1913), ii. 60; E. W. Smith and A. M. Dale, *The Ila-speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia* (London, 1920), i. 261, ii. 83 *sq.*

general among the Australian aborigines, who of all mankind practise exogamy in its most rigid forms. Yet so far as I know these savages are not said to be actuated by any such fear in observing their complex exogamous rules.

But the mere general want of evidence is not the most conclusive argument against the theory in question; for unfortunately the records which we possess of savage life are so imperfect that it is never safe to argue from the silence of the record to the absence of the thing. In short, mere negative evidence, always a broken reed, is perhaps nowhere so broken and treacherous a prop for an argument as in anthropology. Conclusions laid down with confidence one day on the strength of a mere negation may be upset the next day by the discovery of a single positive fact. Accordingly it is perfectly possible that a belief in the injurious effects of incest on the persons who engage in it may in fact be common among savages, though at present very few cases of it have been reported. A more formidable objection to the theory which would base exogamy on such a belief is drawn from the extreme severity with which in most exogamous tribes breaches of exogamy have been punished by the community. The usual penalty for such offences is death inflicted on both the culprits. Now if people had thought that incest injured the incestuous persons themselves and nobody else, society might well have been content to leave the sinners to suffer the natural and inevitable consequences of their sin. Why should it step in and say, "You have hurt yourselves, therefore we will put you to death"? It may be laid down as an axiom applicable to all states of society that society only punishes social offences, that is, offences which are

believed to be injurious, not necessarily to the individual offenders, but to the community at large; and the severer the punishment meted out to them, the deeper the injury they must be supposed to inflict on the commonwealth. But society cannot inflict any penalty heavier than death; therefore capital crimes must be those which are thought to be most dangerous and detrimental to the whole body of the people. From this it follows that in commonly punishing breaches of exogamy, or, in short, incest, with death, exogamous tribes must be of opinion that the offence is a most serious injury to the whole community. Only thus can we reasonably explain the horror which incest usually excites among them and the extreme rigour with which they visit it even to the extermination of the culprits.

What then can be the great social wrong which was supposed to result from incest? how were the guilty persons believed to endanger the whole tribe by their crime? A possible answer is that the intercourse of near kin was thought to render the women of the tribe sterile and to endanger the common food-supply by preventing edible animals from multiplying and edible plants from growing; in short, that the effect of incest was supposed to be sterility of women, animals, and plants. Such beliefs appear in point of fact to have been held by many races in different parts of the world. The idea that sexual crime in general and incest in particular blights the crops is common among peoples of the Malayan stock in the Indian Archipelago and their kinsfolk in Indo-China; but it is also strongly held by some natives of West Africa, and there are grounds for thinking that similar notions as to the injurious effect of incest on women

and cattle as well as on the corn prevailed among the primitive Semites and the primitive Aryans, including the ancient Greeks, the ancient Latins, and the ancient Irish. The evidence has been collected by me elsewhere.[1] Now, if any such beliefs were entertained by the founders of exogamy, they would clearly have been perfectly sufficient motives for instituting the system, for they would perfectly explain the horror with which incest has been regarded and the extreme severity with which it has been punished. You cannot do men a deeper injury than by preventing their women from bearing children and by stopping their supply of food; for by doing the first you hinder them from propagating their kind, and by doing the second you menace them with death. The most serious dangers, therefore, which threaten any community are that its women should bear no children and that it should have nothing to eat; and crimes which imperil the production of children and the supply of food deserve to be punished by any society which values its existence with the utmost rigour of the law. If therefore the savages who devised exogamy really supposed that incest prevented women from bearing children, animals from multiplying, and plants from growing, they were perfectly justified from their point of view in taking the elaborate precautions which they did take to prevent sexual unions which, in their opinion, struck such deadly blows at the life of the community.

But was this really their belief? The only serious difficulty in the way of supposing that it was so, is the absence of evidence that such notions are held by the most primitive exogamous peoples, the Australian

[1] *Psyche's Task*,[2] pp. 44-75.

aborigines, amongst whom we should certainly expect to find them if they had indeed been the origin of exogamy. Further, it is to be observed that all the peoples who are known to hold the beliefs in question appear to be agricultural, and what they especially dread is the sterilizing effect of incest on their crops; they are not so often said to fear its sterilizing effect on women and cattle, though this may be partly explained by the simple circumstance that some of these races do not keep cattle. But the savage founders of exogamy, if we may judge by the Australian aborigines of to-day, were certainly not agricultural; they did not even know that seed put in the ground will germinate and grow. Thus the known distribution of the beliefs as to the sterilizing effect of incest on women, animals, and the crops, suggests that it is a product of a culture somewhat more advanced than can be ascribed to the savages who started exogamy. In fact, it might be argued that all such notions as to the injurious natural consequences of incest are an effect rather than the cause of its prohibition; that is, the peoples in question may first have banned the marriage of near kin for some reasons unknown and may afterwards have become so habituated to the observance of the incest law that they regarded infractions of it as breaches of what we should call natural law and therefore as calculated to disturb the course of nature. In short, it is possible that this superstition is rather late than early, and that therefore it cannot be the root of exogamy.

On the other hand it must be borne in mind that the chief consideration which tells against assuming such a superstition to be the origin of exogamy is

the purely negative one that no such superstition has yet, so far as I know, been found among the Australian aborigines, amongst whom on this theory it might be expected to flourish. But I have already pointed out the danger of relying on merely negative evidence; and considering everything as carefully as I can I incline, though with great hesitancy and reserve, to think that exogamy may have sprung from a belief in the injurious and especially the sterilizing effects of incest, not upon the persons who engage in it, at least not upon the man, nor upon the offspring, but upon women generally and particularly upon edible animals and plants; and I venture to conjecture that a careful search among the most primitive exogamous peoples now surviving, especially among the Australian aborigines, might still reveal the existence of such a belief among them. At least if that is not the origin of exogamy, I must confess to being completely baffled, for I have no other conjecture to offer on the subject.

LXII

THE CLASSIFICATORY SYSTEM OF RELATIONSHIP [1]

The researches of the American ethnologist L. H. Morgan and others within the last sixty or seventy years have proved that like savages in many, if not all, parts of the world the Australian aborigines count kin according to what is called the classificatory system of relationship. The fundamental principle of that system is that kinship is reckoned between groups rather than between individuals; for example, under it a man

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i. pp. 286-288.

gives the name of father not to one individual man only but to a group of men, any one of whom might, in accordance with the tribal custom, have been his father; he gives the name of mother not to one individual woman only but to a group of women, any one of whom might, in accordance with the tribal custom, have been his mother; he gives the name of brother and sister, not only to the children of his father and mother, but to a group of men and women who are the offspring of all those women and men whom his father and mother might, in accordance with the tribal custom, have married; he gives the name of wife not only to his actual wife but to all the women whom the custom of the tribe would have allowed him to marry; and he gives the name of sons and daughters not only to children whom he has himself begotten but also to all the children of those women whom he might have married but did not. Strange as this system of group relationship seems to us, it is actually prevalent at the present day over a great part, probably the greater part of the world; and it is only explicable, as we shall see presently, on the hypothesis that it sprang from, and accurately represents, a system of group marriage, that is, a system in which a group of men enjoyed marital rights over a group of women, so that any man of the one group might call any woman of the other group his wife and treat her as such; while every child born of such group marriages gave the name of father to every one of the whole group of men to which his actual father belonged, and the name of mother to every one of the whole group of women to which his actual mother belonged. Such titles would not by any means imply a belief that the speaker had been begotten by all the men of his father's group

or borne by all the women of his mother's group. It would mean no more than that he stood in a similar social, not physical, relationship to all the men and women of these groups. It would mean that the duties which he owed to them and the rights which he claimed from them were the same in respect of every member of the group, and were neither greater nor less in respect of his physical father and mother than in respect of all the other men and women on whom he bestowed the names of father and mother. In short, under this system paternity and maternity, brotherhood and sisterhood, sonship and daughtership designated social not consanguineous relationships, the tie of blood being either ignored or at all events cast into the background by the greater importance of the tie which bound all the members of the groups together. It was, to all appearance, a period not of individualism but of social communism ; and when we remember how feeble each individual man is by comparison with the larger animals, we may be ready to admit that in his early struggles with them for the mastery a system which knit large groups of men and women together by the closest ties was more favourable to progress than one which would have limited the family group to a single pair and their offspring. Then, perhaps even more than now, union was strength : disunion and dispersal would have exposed our ancestors to the risk of being exterminated piecemeal by their ferocious and individually far stronger adversaries, the large carnivorous animals.

LXIII

ORIGIN OF THE CLASSIFICATORY SYSTEM IN GROUP MARRIAGE [1]

A survey of the cardinal terms of relationship in the central and northern tribes of Australia suffices to prove their classificatory nature. They are terms which designate relationships between groups, not between individuals. Each individual is classed as the son or daughter of many fathers and of many mothers: he or she classes as brothers and sisters many men and women who on our system are no relations at all to him or her: every man classes many women as his wives besides the one to whom he is actually married: every woman classes many men as her husbands besides the one to whom she is actually married: every man and every woman class as their children many boys and girls whom they neither begat nor bare. Thus the whole population is distributed into groups, and the system of kinship consists of the relations of these groups to each other. The only reasonable and probable explanation of such a system of group relationships is that it originated in a system of group marriage, that is, in a state of society in which groups of men exercised marital rights over groups of women, and the limitation of one wife to one husband was unknown. Such a system of group marriage would explain very simply why every man gives the name of wife to a whole group of women, and every woman gives the name of husband to a whole group of men, with only one

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i. pp. 303-305

or even with none of whom he or she need have marital relations ; why every man and every woman apply the names of father and mother to whole groups of men and women of whom it is physically impossible that more than two individuals can be their parents ; why every man and every woman apply the names of brother and sister to whole groups of men and women with whom they need not have a drop of blood in common ; and why, finally, every man and every woman claim as their sons and daughters whole groups of men and women whom they neither begat nor bare. In short, group marriage explains group relationship, and it is hard to see what else can do so.

Apart from the reluctance which some people feel to admit that a large part or the whole of mankind has passed through a stage of social evolution in which individual marriage was unknown, the only serious obstacle to the acceptance of this simple and adequate explanation of the classificatory system is the difficulty of understanding how a person should ever come to be treated as the child of many mothers. This difficulty only exists so long as we confuse our word " mother " with the corresponding but by no means equivalent terms in the languages of savages who have the classificatory system. We mean by " mother " a woman who has given birth to a child ; the Australian savages mean by " mother " a woman who stands in a certain social relation to a group of men and women, whether she has given birth to any one of them or not. She is " mother " to that group even when she is an infant in arms. A grown man has been seen playing with a small girl whom he called quite seriously and, according to his system of relationship, quite rightly his " mother ". But he was not

such a fool as to imagine that the child had given birth to him. He was merely using the term " mother " in the Australian, not the English, sense ; and if we will only clear our minds of the confusion created by the common verbal fallacy of employing the same word in two different senses, the imaginary difficulty about one man and many mothers will cease to block the straight road to the understanding of the classificatory system of relationship. It is not even necessary to suppose that, as Dr. Rivers has suggested, the blood tie between a mother and her offspring may, under a system of group marriage, have been forgotten in later life, so that adults would be as uncertain about their mothers as they were about their fathers. The true relation between mother and child may always have been remembered, but it was an accident which did not in any way affect the mother's place in the classificatory system ; for she was classed with a group of " mothers " just as much before as after her child was born. Similarly a man is classed with a group of " fathers " when he is a toddling infant just as much as when he has begotten a large family. The classificatory system is based on the marital, not on the parental, relation. It is founded on the division of the community into two intermarrying groups. From that simple and primary grouping all the other groups and all the group relationships of the system appear to be derived.

LXIV

THE CLASSIFICATORY SYSTEM AND THE DUAL ORGANIZATION [1]

If the reader will take the trouble to compare the relationships of men and women, which I have theoretically deduced from a simple exogamous bisection of the community,[2] with the relationships actually recognized by the classificatory system, he will at once perceive their substantial agreement, though for the sake of simplicity and clearness I have refrained from following the system through its more remote ramifications in the fourth and fifth generations. The agreement should convince him that the classificatory system of relationship has in fact resulted from a simple bisection of the community into two exogamous classes and from nothing else. It should be particularly observed that the two-class system of exogamy or dual organization, as it is often called, suffices of itself to create the classificatory system of relationship, which appears not to have been materially affected by the subsequent adoption of the four-class and eight-class systems in certain tribes. This observation is important, because, while the classificatory system of relationship is found to be diffused over a great part of the world, the four-class and eight-class systems have hitherto been detected in Australia alone. In the absence of evidence to the contrary we accordingly infer that the successive bisections of the two-class system into four and eight

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. pp. 123-124.
[2] See *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. pp. 122-123.

classes have been inventions of the Australian intellect alone, and that the existence of the classificatory system in other races of men raises no presumption that these races have ever practised exogamy in any more complex form than the simple two-class system.

Thus with the institution of two exogamous classes and the resulting system of group marriage the classificatory system of relationship springs up of itself; it simply defines the relations of all the men and women of the community to each other according to the generation and the exogamous class to which they belong. The seemingly complex system of relationship, like the seemingly complex system of exogamy on which it is based, turns out to be simple enough when we view it from its starting-point in the bisection of a community into two exogamous classes.

LXV

GROUP MARRIAGE AND GROUP RELATIONSHIP[1]

The relations constituted by the rights of groups of men over groups of women are expressed and, as it were, crystallized in the system of group relationship, commonly known as the classificatory system, which has survived in many parts of the world long after the system of group marriage has disappeared. The system of group relationship may be compared to a cast taken of the living system of group marriage: that cast represents the original in all the minute details of its organic structure, and continues to

[1] *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, vol. ii. pp. 230-232.

record it for the instruction of posterity long after the organism itself is dead and mouldered into dust. In Central Australia the system of group marriage persisted, along with the system of group relationship, down to our own time; and it is perhaps the only part of the world where the original and the cast have been found together, the one still superposed, as it were, on the other and fitting it to some extent, though not with perfect exactness; for even here the living system of group marriage had shrunk and was probably wasting away.

From a study of the Australian tribes, which have preserved both the cast and something of the original, in other words, both the system of group relationship and the system of group marriage, more perfectly than any other known race of men, we can define with some approach to exactness the nature and extent of the intermarrying groups on which the terms of group relationship were modelled. Among the Australian aborigines, these intermarrying groups are regularly two, four, or eight in number, according to the tribe; for some tribes have two such exogamous groups, others have four, and others again have eight. Where the system is in full working order and has not fallen into obvious decay, the number of the exogamous classes is invariably two or a multiple of two, never an odd number. This suggests, what all the evidence tends to confirm, that these various groups have been produced by the deliberate and repeated bisection of a community, first into two, then into four, and finally into eight exogamous and intermarrying groups or classes; for no one, so far as I know, has yet ventured to maintain that society is subject to a physical law, in virtue of which communities, like crystals, tend

automatically and unconsciously to integrate or disintegrate, along rigid mathematical lines, into exactly symmetrical units. The effect of these successive dichotomies is of course to limit more and more the number of women with whom a man may lawfully have sexual relations. By the division of the community into two groups or classes, he is restricted, in his choice, roughly speaking, to one half of the women; by the division into four he is restricted to one fourth of the women; and by the division into eight he is restricted to one eighth. It is not of course implied that a man has now, or indeed ever had, sexual relations with all the women of the group into which he is allowed to marry; but he calls all these women his wives, and while he now regularly has one or more women with whom he cohabits to the practical exclusion of others, it seems probable that this limitation has resulted from the same gradual shrinkage of the intermarrying groups which appears most conspicuously in the successive divisions of the community into two, four, and eight intermarrying classes. To put it otherwise, we may suppose that formerly the sexual relations between groups of men and women were much looser than they are now, that in fact men of one group much oftener exercised those marital rights over the women of the corresponding group which in theory they still possess, though practically they have to a great extent allowed them to fall into abeyance.

LXVI

THE CLASSIFICATORY SYSTEM A LANDMARK IN HISTORY[1]

The classificatory system of relationship forms one of the great landmarks in the history of mankind. The distinction between the classificatory and the descriptive systems of relationship, or, as I should prefer to put it, the distinction between the system of group relationship and the system of individual relationship, coincides, broadly speaking, with the distinction between savagery and civilization; the boundary between the lower and the higher strata of humanity runs approximately on the line between the two different modes of counting kin, the one mode counting it by groups, the other by individuals. Reduced to its most general terms, the line of cleavage is between collectivism and individualism: savagery stands on the side of collectivism, civilization stands on the side of individualism.

LXVII

THE LEVIRATE AND THE SORORATE[2]

There are two customs of wide prevalence throughout the world which separately and in conjunction may perhaps be explained on the hypothesis that they are relics of group marriage and in particular of that form of group marriage which L. H. Morgan called the punaluan, to wit, the union of a group of husbands

[1] *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, vol. ii. p. 227.
[2] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. pp. 139-140.

who are brothers with a group of wives who are sisters. The first of these customs is the world-wide rule which allows or requires a man to marry the widow of his deceased elder brother; the other is the rule which allows or requires a man to marry the younger sisters either of his living or of his deceased wife. Or, to put the same customs from the point of view of the woman, we may say that the former custom allows or requires her to marry her deceased husband's brother, and that the latter custom allows or requires her to marry the husband either of her living or of her deceased sister. The former custom has long been known under the name of the *levirate*, from the Latin *levir*, "a husband's brother"; the latter custom, which has received very little attention, has no distinctive name, but on analogy I propose to call it the *sororate*, from the Latin *soror*, "a sister".

The two customs are in fact correlative; they present in all probability two sides of one original custom, and it is convenient to give them corresponding names.

LXVIII

THE LEVIRATE AND GROUP MARRIAGE[1]

The custom of marrying a deceased brother's widow is known as the levirate. It occurs in many, though not in all, Australian tribes, and it has been practised by many other peoples in many other parts of the world. The custom is probably to be explained with Dr. Howitt, at least for Australia, as a relic of group marriage: the brothers, who under that system would have shared their wives in their lifetime, after-

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i. pp. 501-502.

wards inherited them successively, each stepping one after the other into the shoes of his deceased predecessor. The eminent anthropologist, J. F. McLennan, indeed, proposed to explain the levirate as a relic of polyandry, not of group marriage. But against this view it is to be said that group marriage is found in Australia, whereas polyandry is not ; so that the cause presupposed by Howitt actually exists in the region where the custom is practised, while the cause presupposed by McLennan does not. Further, it should be borne in mind, that whereas both the levirate and the classificatory system of relationship, with its plain testimony to group marriage, occur very widely over the world, the custom of polyandry appears to have been comparatively rare and exceptional, and the reason for its rarity is simply that the only basis on which polyandry could permanently exist, to wit, a great numerical preponderance of men over women, appears never to have been a normal condition with any race of men of whom we have knowledge. In Africa, for example, as in Australia, the custom of the levirate is very common and the classificatory system of relationship seems to be widely spread, but the custom of polyandry is apparently extremely rare: indeed, so far as I know, it is reported only of a single African tribe, the Bahima or Banyankole of Uganda.[1] It is more reasonable, therefore, to look for the origin of the widely diffused custom of the levirate in a custom like group marriage, which we have good reason for believing to have been at one time very widely diffused, rather than in a custom like polyandry, for which no such evidence is forthcoming.

[1] See J. Roscoe, *The Northern Bantu* (Cambridge, 1915), p. 121 ; *id.*, *The Banyankole* (Cambridge, 1923), p. 123.

But when the levirate survived, as it often did, among peoples who had left group marriage far behind them, it would naturally assume a different character with its changed surroundings. Thus, wherever the rights of property and the practice of purchasing wives had become firmly established, the tendency was to regard the widow as part of the inheritance which passed to the heir, whether he was a brother, a son, or any other relation of the deceased husband. This, for example, appears to be the current view of the levirate in Africa, where the custom is commonly observed. Again, wherever it came to be supposed that a man's eternal welfare in the other world depends on his leaving children behind him, who will perform the rites necessary for his soul's salvation, it naturally became the pious duty of the survivors to remedy as far as they could the parlous state of a kinsman who had died childless, and on none would that duty appear to be more incumbent than on the brother of the deceased. In such circumstances the old custom of the levirate might be continued, or perhaps revived, with the limitation which we find in Hebrew and Hindoo law, namely that a brother must marry his brother's widow only in the case where the deceased died childless, and only for the purpose of begetting on the widow a son or sons for him who had left none of his own. Thus what had once been regarded as a right of succession to be enjoyed by the heir might afterwards come to be viewed as a burdensome and even repulsive obligation imposed upon a surviving brother or other kinsman, who submitted to it reluctantly out of a sense of duty to the dead. This is the light in which the levirate has been considered by Hindoo lawgivers.

LXIX

THE LEVIRATE AND THE SORORATE AS RELICS OF GROUP MARRIAGE[1]

The rule that when a man marries a woman he has a right to marry her sisters also is widespread, notably among the Indians of North America. It is clearly the converse of the rule which assigns a man's widows to his brothers, and as the latter rule points to the marriage of women to a group of brothers, so the former rule points to the marriage of men to a group of sisters. Taken together, the two customs seem to indicate the former prevalence of marriage between a group of husbands who were brothers to each other and a group of wives who were sisters to each other. In practice the custom which permits a man to marry several sisters has diverged in an important respect from the custom which permits a woman to marry several brothers; for whereas the permission granted to a man to marry several sisters simultaneously in their lifetime has survived in many races to this day, the permission granted to a woman to marry several brothers has generally been restricted by the provision that she may only marry them successively, each after the death of his predecessor. We may conjecture that the cause of the divergence between the two customs was the greater strength of the passion of jealousy in men than in women, sisters being more willing to share a husband between them than brothers to share a wife.

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. ii. p. 144.

LXX

THE BARTER OF SISTERS AS A SOURCE OF GROUP MARRIAGE[1]

If we ask what was the origin of a form of group marriage which would seem to have prevailed so widely, we may conjecture that it rested on a system of exchange like that which appears to lie at the root of the cross-cousin marriage.[2] As a matter of fact, men commonly exchange their sisters in marriage, because that is the easiest and cheapest way of obtaining a wife. For similar reasons in a society where group marriage was in vogue, it would be natural for a group of brothers to exchange their sisters for the sisters of another group of brothers, each set of men thereafter using the sisters of the other set of men as their common wives. In this way, on the simple principle of bartering women between families, a system of group marriage might easily arise in which all the husbands of each group were brothers and all the wives of each group were sisters to each other, though not to their husbands.

Thus, if I am right, the sororate and the levirate are offshoots from one common root, a system of group marriage in which all the husbands were brothers and all the wives were sisters to each other, though not to their husbands; and that system in its turn originated in a simple desire to get wives as easily and cheaply as possible.

[1] *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, vol. ii. p. 317.

[2] As to cross-cousin marriage see below, pp. 172 *sqq*.

LXXI

EXOGAMY AND THE CLASSIFICATORY SYSTEM NOT NECESSARILY UNIVERSAL STAGES IN THE PROGRESS OF HUMANITY [1]

Thus it appears to be a reasonable hypothesis that at least a large part of mankind has passed through the stage of group marriage in its progress upward from a still lower stage of sexual promiscuity to a higher stage of monogamy. Apart from the customs of the levirate and the sororate and the traces of a wider freedom formerly accorded to the sexes in their relations with each other, the two great landmarks of group marriage are exogamy and the classificatory system of relationship, which, as I have attempted to show, are inseparably united and must stand or fall together as evidence of an ancient system of communal marriage.

But exogamy and the classificatory system of relationship are, roughly speaking, confined to the lower races of mankind: they form a clear and trenchant line between savagery and civilization. Almost the only civilized race which, so to say, stands astride this great border-line are the Aryan Hindoos, who possess the system of exogamy without the classificatory system of relationship. Whether they have inherited exogamy from the common ancestors of the whole Aryan family or have borrowed it from the dark-skinned aborigines of India, with whom they have been in contact for thousands of years, is a question of the highest interest not merely for the

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. pp. 151-153.

history of the Aryans in particular, but for the history of human marriage in general; since if it could be made probable that the whole Aryan family had once passed through the stage of exogamy, with its natural accompaniment the classificatory system of relationship, it would become difficult to resist the conclusion that exogamy, with all its implications of group marriage and a preceding custom of sexual promiscuity, had once been universal among mankind. But in the absence of proof that the Semites and the Aryans in general ever practised exogamy and counted kinship on the classificatory system we are not justified in concluding that these institutions have at one time been common to the whole human race. Nor, apart from the want of direct evidence, does there appear to be any reason in the nature of things why these institutions should be necessary stages in the social evolution of every people. The object of exogamy, as I have attempted to show, was to prevent the marriage of near kin, especially the marriage of brothers with sisters and of mothers with sons; and it seems perfectly possible that some peoples may have achieved this object directly by a simple prohibition of consanguineous marriages without resorting to that expedient of dividing the whole community into two intermarrying classes, from which the vast and cumbrous system of exogamy and the classificatory relationships grew by a logical development. The history of exogamy is the history first of a growing and afterwards of a decaying scrupulosity as to the marriage of near kin. With every fresh scruple a fresh bar was erected between the sexes, till the barriers reach their greatest known height in the eight-class system of the Australian aborigines, which practically shuts the

door for every man upon seven-eighths of the women of the community. Whether any tribes ever carried their scruples still farther and reduced within even narrower limits the number of a man's possible wives is not known; and if there ever were such tribes they probably perished either from the mere difficulty of propagating their kind under these too elaborate restrictions, or because their ever-dwindling numbers could not resist the pressure of less scrupulous and faster-breeding neighbours. Having reached its culminating point in bloated systems of eight classes and the like, exogamy begins to decline. The exogamy of the classes was the first to go, leaving behind it the far less extensive and therefore far less burdensome exogamy of the clans, whether totemic or otherwise. It is in this greatly shrunken form, shorn of its original classes, that the institution is still found in the great majority of exogamous peoples outside of Australia. The last stage of decay is reached when the exogamy of the clan breaks down also, and henceforth marriage is regulated by the prohibited degrees alone.

Now it is quite possible that the great civilized families of mankind, who now regulate marriage only by the prohibited degrees of kinship, have run through this course of social development and decay in the remote past. They may at one time in their history, not necessarily the earliest, have practised sexual promiscuity, have felt a growing aversion to the marriage of near kin, have embodied that aversion in a system of exogamy, and finally, discarding that system with its exaggerations, have reverted to a simple prohibition of the marriage of persons closely related by blood. But it is not necessary to suppose that they have followed this long roundabout road

merely to return to the point from which they started. They may always have confined themselves to a simple prohibition of the incestuous unions which they abhorred.

LXXII

THE MARRIAGE OF CROSS-COUSINS [1]

The reason why a large group of tribes in Central and Northern Australia has carried the social subdivision one step farther by splitting each of the four exogamous classes into two and so producing the eight-class system, appears to have been a growing aversion to the marriage of what are called cross-cousins, the children of a brother and of a sister respectively.[2] For we know that many Australian tribes forbid such marriages, even though they have not adopted the eight-class system, which effectually prevents them. Indeed, some tribes which discountenance the marriage of cross-cousins, such as the Dieri and the Kulin, never advanced beyond the stage of the two-class system. This shows how even an exogamous community may by a simple prohibition bar

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. pp. 119-120.

[2] First cousins are the children either of two brothers or of two sisters, or of a brother and of a sister respectively. Cousins of this last sort (the children of a brother and of a sister respectively) are now commonly called cross-cousins. Cousins of the other two sorts (the children of two brothers or of two sisters) have no special name in English; to distinguish them from cross-cousins, I call them ortho-cousins. The distinction between cross-cousins and ortho-cousins is ignored by civilized nations, but is regarded as of fundamental importance by many peoples of the lower culture, who, while they strictly forbid the marriage of ortho-cousins (the children of two brothers or of two sisters), allow, favour, or even enjoin the marriage of cross-cousins (the children of a brother and of a sister respectively). The marriage of ortho-cousins (the children of two brothers or of two sisters) is prevented by both the two-class system and the four-class system: the marriage of cross-cousins is prevented by the eight-class system alone. Hence Australian tribes which have adopted the eight-class system ban the marriage of all first cousins whatsoever.

marriages which it disapproves of without needing to extend its exogamous system by further subdivisions. The incest line has most commonly wavered at cross-cousins, the children of a brother and of a sister respectively, opinion sometimes inclining decidedly in favour of, and sometimes decidedly against, these unions. So it has been in Australia and so it has been elsewhere down to our own time in our own country. In Australia some, but not all, of the tribes which disapproved of the marriage of cross-cousins expressed their disapproval by extending their exogamous system so as to include such unions in its ban. Others contented themselves with keeping the old exogamous system in its simpler forms of two or four classes and merely forbidding the marriages in question.

LXXIII

THE ORIGIN OF CROSS-COUSIN MARRIAGE[1]

The two commonest forms of barter in the Australian matrimonial market were the exchange of daughters and the exchange of sisters, and it is not clear which of the two forms was the more prevalent, for our authorities differ on the subject, some of them assigning the palm in point of popularity to the one form, and some to the other. Probably the usage varied somewhat in different tribes. In general it seems likely that in the rivalry between the older and the younger men for the possession of wives the older men would favour the exchange of daughters, because it gave them the chance of adding to their own harem, while the younger men would as naturally

[1] *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, vol. ii. pp. 202-206, 209-210, 220.

prefer the exchange of sisters, because it placed their matrimonial destiny in their own hands instead of in the hands of their venerable parents, the old bucks, whose personal designs on the youthful brides they had in many cases only too good reason to suspect. In some tribes, for example, in those of Western Victoria, "the rule is that a father alone can give away his daughter. If the father is dead the son can dispose of the daughter, with the consent of the uncle." Similarly among some tribes of South Australia "brothers often barter their sisters for wives for themselves, but it can only be done with the parents' consent, or after their death." On the other hand, among the Narrinyeri, a tribe of South Australia, "a girl was given in marriage, usually at an early age, sometimes by her father, but generally by her brother, and there was always an exchange of a sister, or other female relative, of the man to whom she was promised". So common, indeed, among the Australian aborigines was this custom of bartering sisters at marriage that in some tribes of Southern Queensland men who had no sisters to offer in exchange had hardly any chance of being married at all.

Of the two forms of barter, the exchange of sisters by their brothers was probably older than the exchange of daughters by their fathers, since the latter implies the recognition not only of paternity but of a father's right to dispose of his offspring, and there are strong grounds for believing that in aboriginal Australia and probably elsewhere the relations between the sexes were at one time so loose and vague that no man knew his own children or possessed any authority over them. On the other hand, even under such

conditions, the relationship between brothers and sisters, the children of the same mother, must have been well known, and the recognition of that relationship probably conferred on brothers a degree of authority which enabled them to exchange their sisters or their sisters' daughters for other women, whom they either married themselves or gave in marriage to their sisters' sons. Thus in Australia, and perhaps in many other places, the right of disposing of a woman's hand in marriage may have been enjoyed by her brother or her mother's brother long before it devolved on her father. But as society progressed from group marriage, or from still laxer forms of commerce between the sexes, to individual marriage, in other words, as sexual relations were more and more narrowed and confined to the cohabitation of single pairs, a man would gradually acquire an interest in, and an authority over, his wife's children, even before he became aware of the share he had had in begetting them ; for the social position which he occupied as the husband, protector, and in some sense the owner of their mother, would give him rights over her offspring analogous to those which the owner of a cow possesses over her calves. Indeed, to this day the very fact of physical paternity is unknown to many Australian tribes, but their ignorance on that point does not prevent these savages from recognizing the mutual rights and duties of fathers and children, since these social rights and duties are both in theory and in practice perfectly distinct from, and independent of, the bond of blood between the persons. Hence to a superficial observer the position of a father to his children in these tribes might well appear not to differ materially from the corresponding

position of a father to his children in Europe, although in point of fact the physical relationship between them, on which alone, to our thinking, the social relationship is based, has not so much as entered into the mind of the aborigines. For these reasons we may fairly suppose that, with the progressive substitution of individual for group marriage, the right of disposing of a woman in marriage was gradually transferred from her brother or her maternal uncle to her father.

But in whichever way the exchange of women in marriage was originally effected, whether by the brothers or by the fathers of the women, it is certain that the custom has been exceedingly common among the aborigines of Australia, and from it the custom of cross-cousin marriage might very easily arise. For when two men had thus married each other's sisters, their children would be cross-cousins, and what more natural than that these cross-cousins should in their turn marry each other when they came to maturity, as their parents had done before them? It is to be observed that such cross-cousins are related to each other by a twofold tie of consanguinity, since they are connected not, like ordinary cross-cousins, through one father and one mother only, but through both fathers and both mothers. For the father of each cousin is the brother of the other cousin's mother, and the mother of each cousin is the sister of the other cousin's father. In fact, the cousins are cross-cousins twice over, or what we may call double-cross-cousins. It follows from this double-cross relationship that the female cousin stands to her male cousin in the relation both of mother's brother's daughter and of father's sister's daughter; hence their marriage combines the

two forms of cross-cousin marriage which are usually distinguished, namely the marriage with a mother's brother's daughter and the marriage with a father's sister's daughter. Such a marriage is therefore a very close form of consanguineous union.

But if the custom of exchanging sisters in marriage preceded not only the recognition of physical paternity but even the establishment of permanent social relations between a man and his offspring, it seems probable that the custom of marrying cousins, as a direct consequence of the interchange of sisters in marriage, also preceded both the recognition of paternity and the exercise of any authority by a father over his children. For if a man had the right of exchanging a sister for a wife, there seems to be no reason why he should not have effected the exchange as readily with a cousin as with any other man. Hence we need not, with Dr. Rivers, suppose that the authority of a father over his children was established before the practice of marrying cousins arose.

The view that the custom of cross-cousin marriage originated in the interchange of sisters is supported by the present practice of the Kariera tribe of Western Australia, whose marriage system has been accurately observed and described by Professor A. R. Brown. For in that tribe not only do men commonly exchange sisters in marriage, but the double-cross-cousins who result from such unions are also allowed and even encouraged to marry each other. . . . Among the Kariera the most proper marriage that can be contracted is that between first cousins who are doubly related to each other by blood, that is, both through the father and through the mother, since the husband's father is the wife's mother's brother, and the husband's

mother is the wife's father's sister. In other words, a man marries a woman who is at the same time the daughter of his father's sister and of his mother's brother; and a woman marries a man who is at the same time the son of her mother's brother and of her father's sister; in short, husband and wife in such cases are double-cross-cousins. This double relationship by blood between the pair arises from the interchange of sisters as wives between their two fathers. . . . Thus in the Kariera tribe the marriage of cross-cousins flows directly and simply, in the ordinary course of events, from the interchange of sisters in marriage. Given that interchange and the intermarriage of the resulting offspring, and we have cross-cousin marriage in its fullest form, namely the marriage of first cousins who are doubly related to each other both through their fathers and through their mothers; in short, we have the marriage of double-cross cousins. But the interchange of sisters in marriage was common, we may almost say universal, in aboriginal Australia, while the marriage of cross-cousins was permitted or specially favoured in some tribes. It seems reasonable to suppose that in all Australian tribes which permitted or favoured the marriage of cross-cousins, such marriages were the direct consequence of the interchange of sisters in marriage and of nothing else. And that interchange of sisters flowed directly from the economic necessity of paying for a wife in kind, in other words, of giving a woman in return for the woman whom a man received in marriage.

Having found in aboriginal Australia what appears to be a simple and natural explanation of cousin marriage, we are next led to inquire whether the same cause may not have had the same effect elsewhere;

in other words, whether in other regions, where the marriage of cross-cousins is permitted or favoured, such unions may not flow directly from the interchange of sisters in marriage. There is some reason to think that it has been so. At all events we can show that the custom of interchanging sisters in marriage occurs in some of those regions where the custom of cross-cousin marriage prevails ; and since in Australia these two customs appear to be related to each other as cause and effect, it is natural to suppose that the same causal relation obtains between the two customs when they are found conjoined elsewhere.

. . . . . .

On the whole, then, it seems probable that the practice of exchanging daughters or sisters in marriage was everywhere at first a simple case of barter, and that it originated in a low state of savagery where women had a high economic value as labourers, but where private property was as yet at so rudimentary a stage that a man had practically no equivalent to give for a wife except another woman. The same economic motive might lead the offspring of such unions, who would be cross-cousins, to marry each other, and thus in the easiest and most natural manner the custom of cross-cousin marriage would arise and be perpetuated. If the history of the custom could be followed in the many different parts of the world where it has prevailed, it might be possible everywhere to trace it back to this simple origin ; for under the surface alike of savagery and of civilization the economic forces are as constant and uniform in their operation as the forces of nature, of which, indeed, they are merely a peculiarly complex manifestation.

LXXIV

MAN NOT AN AUTOMATON [1]

All attempts to trace the origin and growth of human institutions without the intervention of human intelligence and will are radically vicious and foredoomed to failure. It may seem to some to be scientific to treat savage man as a mere automaton, a shuttlecock of nature, a helpless creature of circumstances, and so to explain the evolution of primitive society, like the evolution of material bodies, by the play of physical forces alone. But a history of man so written is neither science nor history : it is a parody of both. For it ignores the prime factor of the movement, the mainspring of the whole machine, and that is man's conscious life, his thoughts, his aspirations, his endeavours. In every age he has had these, and they, far more than anything else, have moulded his institutions. External nature certainly acts on him, but he reacts on it, and his history is the resultant of that action and reaction. To leave out of account either of these mutually interdependent elements, the external and the internal, is to falsify history by presenting us with an incomplete view of it ; but of the two the internal element is, if not the more influential, certainly the more obvious, the more open to our observation, and therefore the more important for the historian, who in his effort to refer the events of the human drama to their sources may more safely ignore the influence of climate and weather, of soil and water, of rivers and mountains, than the thoughts, the

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i. pp. 281-283.

passions, the ambitions of the actors. We shall as little understand the growth of savage as of civilized institutions if we persist in shutting our eyes to the deliberate choice which man, whether savage or civilized, has exercised in shaping them. It should always be borne in mind that the savage differs from his civilized brother rather in degree than in kind, rather in the point at which his development has been arrested or retarded than in the direction of the line which it has followed; and if, as we know, the one has used his judgement and discretion in making his laws, we may be sure that the other has done so also. The kings and presidents, the senates and parliaments of civilization have their parallels in the chiefs and headmen, the councils of elders and the tribal assemblies of savagery; and the laws promulgated by the former have their counterpart in the customs initiated and enforced by the latter. Among savage customs there are few or none that bear the impress of thought and purpose stamped upon them so clearly as the complex yet regular marriage system of the Australian aborigines. We shall do well therefore to acquiesce in the opinion of the best observers, who ascribe the origin of that system to the prolonged reflection and deliberate intention of the natives themselves.

LXXV

LAWS NEVER WHOLLY NEW[1]

A very little thought will satisfy us that laws in general do not spring armed cap-à-pie into existence like Athena from the head of Zeus, at the moment

[1] *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, vol. iii. pp. 93-94.

when they are codified. Legislation and codification are two very different things. Legislation is the authoritative enactment of certain rules of conduct which have either not been observed or have not been legally binding before the acts enforcing them were passed by the supreme authority. But even new laws are seldom or never complete innovations ; they nearly always rest upon and presuppose a basis of existing custom and public opinion which harmonize more or less with the new laws, and have long silently prepared for their reception in the minds of the people. The most despotic monarch in the world could not force upon his subjects an absolutely new law, which should run counter to the whole bent and current of their natural disposition, outraging all their hereditary opinions and habits, flouting all their most cherished sentiments and aspirations. Even in the most seemingly revolutionary enactment there is always a conservative element which succeeds in securing the general assent and obedience of a community. Only a law which in some measure answers to a people's past has any power to mould that people's future. To reconstruct human society from the foundations upward is a visionary enterprise, harmless enough so long as it is confined to the Utopias of philosophic dreamers, but dangerous and possibly disastrous when it is attempted in practice by men, whether demagogues or despots, who by the very attempt prove their ignorance of the fundamental principles of the problem they rashly set themselves to solve. Society is a growth, not a structure ; and though we may modify that growth and mould it into fairer forms, as the gardener by his art has evolved blooms of lovelier shape and richer hue from the humble

flowers of the field and the meadow, the hedgerow and the river-bank, we can as little create society afresh as the gardener can create a lily or a rose. Thus in every law, as in every plant, there is an element of the past, an element which, if we could trace it to its ultimate source, would lead us backwards to the earliest stages of human life in the one case and of plant life in the other.

LXXVI

THE FLUX OF MORALITY [1]

That the ethical like the legal code of a people stands in need of constant revision will hardly be disputed by any attentive and dispassionate observer. The old view that the principles of right and wrong are immutable and eternal is no longer tenable. The moral world is as little exempt as the physical world from the law of ceaseless change, of perpetual flux. Contemplate the diversities, the inconsistencies, the contradictions of the ethical ideas and the ethical practice, not merely of different peoples in different countries, but of the same people in the same country in different ages, then say whether the foundations of morality are eternally fixed and unchanging. If they seem so to us, as they have probably seemed to men in all ages who did not extend their views beyond the narrow limits of their time and country, it is in all likelihood merely because the rate of change is commonly so slow that it is imperceptible at any moment and can only be detected by a comparison

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part II. *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, Preface, pp. vi-viii.

of accurate observations extending over long periods of time. Such a comparison, could we make it, would probably convince us that if we speak of the moral law as immutable and eternal, it can only be in the relative or figurative sense in which we apply the same words to the outlines of the great mountains, by comparison with the short-lived generations of men. The mountains, too, are passing away, though we do not see it; nothing is stable and abiding under or above the sun. We can as little arrest the process of moral evolution as we can stay the sweep of the tides or the courses of the stars.

Therefore, whether we like it or not, the moral code by which we regulate our conduct is being constantly revised and altered: old rules are being silently expunged and new rules silently inscribed in the palimpsest by the busy, the unresting hand of an invisible scribe. For unlike the public and formal revision of a legal code, the revision of the moral code is always private, tacit, and informal. The legislators who make and the judges who administer it are not clad in ermine and scarlet, their edicts are not proclaimed with the blare of trumpets and the pomp of heraldry. We ourselves are the lawgivers and the judges: it is the whole people who make and alter the ethical standard and judge every case by reference to it. We sit in the highest court of appeal, judging offenders daily, and we cannot if we would rid ourselves of the responsibility. All that we can do is to take as clear and comprehensive a view as possible of the evidence, lest from too narrow and partial a view we should do injustice, perhaps gross and irreparable injustice, to the prisoners at the bar. Few things, perhaps, can better guard us from

narrowness and illiberality in our moral judgements than a survey of the amazing diversities of ethical theory and practice which have been recorded among the various races of mankind in different ages; and accordingly the Comparative Method applied to the study of ethical phenomena may be expected to do for morality what the same method applied to religious phenomena is now doing for religion, by enlarging our mental horizon, extending the boundaries of knowledge, throwing light on the origin of current beliefs and practices, and thereby directly assisting us to replace what is effete by what is vigorous, and what is false by what is true.

LXXVII

OUR DEBT TO THE SAVAGE[1]

We stand upon the foundation reared by the generations that have gone before, and we can but dimly conceive the painful and prolonged efforts which it has cost humanity to struggle up to the point, no very exalted one after all, which we have reached. Our gratitude is due to the nameless and forgotten toilers, whose patient thought and active exertions have largely made us what we are. The amount of new knowledge which one age, certainly which one man, can add to the common store is small, and it argues stupidity or dishonesty, besides ingratitude, to ignore the heap while vaunting the few grains which it may have been our privilege to add to it. There is indeed little danger at present of undervaluing the contributions which modern times and even

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part II. *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, pp. 421-422.

classical antiquity have made to the general advancement of our race. But when we pass these limits, the case is different. Contempt and ridicule or abhorrence and denunciation are too often the only recognition vouchsafed to the savage and his ways. Yet of the benefactors whom we are bound thankfully to commemorate, many, perhaps most, were savages. For when all is said and done our resemblances to the savage are still far more numerous than our differences from him ; and what we have in common with him, and deliberately retain as true and useful, we owe to our savage forefathers who slowly acquired by experience and transmitted to us by inheritance those seemingly fundamental ideas which we are apt to regard as original and intuitive. We are like heirs to a fortune which has been handed down for so many ages that the memory of those who built it up is lost, and its possessors for the time being regard it as having been an original and unalterable possession of their race since the beginning of the world. But reflection and inquiry should satisfy us that to our predecessors we are indebted for much of what we thought most our own, and that their errors were not wilful extravagances or the ravings of insanity, but simply hypotheses, justifiable as such at the time when they were propounded, but which a fuller experience has proved to be inadequate. It is only by the successive testing of hypotheses and rejection of the false that truth is at last elicited. After all, what we call truth is only the hypothesis which is found to work best. Therefore in reviewing the opinions and practices of ruder ages and races we shall do well to look with leniency upon their errors as inevitable slips made in the search for truth, and to give them the benefit

of that indulgence of which we ourselves may one day stand in need: *cum excusatione itaque veteres audiendi sunt.*

LXXVIII

THE PILLARS OF SOCIETY[1]

The venerable framework of society rests on many pillars, of which the most solid are nature, reason, and justice; yet at certain stages of its slow and laborious construction it could ill have dispensed with the frail prop of superstition. If the day should ever come when the great edifice has been carried to completion and reposes in simple majesty on adamantine foundations, it will be possible, without risk to its stability, to cut away and destroy the rotten timbers that shored it up in the process of building.

LXXIX

INDIRECT BENEFITS OF SUPERSTITION[2]

To readers bred in a religion which is saturated with the ascetic idealism of the East, the explanation which I have given of the rule of continence observed under certain circumstances by rude or savage peoples may seem far-fetched and improbable. They may think that moral purity, which is so intimately associated in their minds with the observance of such a rule, furnishes a sufficient explanation of it; they may hold with Milton that chastity in itself is a noble virtue, and that the restraint which it imposes on one

[1] *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, vol. i. p. 103.
[2] *The Golden Bough*, Part I. *The Magic Art*, vol. ii. pp. 117-119.

of the strongest impulses of our animal nature marks out those who can submit to it as men raised above the common herd, and therefore worthy to receive the seal of the divine approbation. However natural this mode of thought may seem to us, it is utterly foreign and indeed incomprehensible to the savage. If he resists on occasion the sexual instinct, it is from no high idealism, no ethereal aspiration after moral purity, but for the sake of some ulterior yet perfectly definite and concrete object, to gain which he is prepared to sacrifice the immediate gratification of his senses. That this is or may be so, the examples I have cited are amply sufficient to prove. They show that where the instinct of self-preservation, which manifests itself chiefly in the search for food, conflicts or appears to conflict with the instinct which conduces to the propagation of the species, the former instinct, as the primary and more fundamental, is capable of overmastering the latter. In short, the savage is willing to restrain his sexual propensity for the sake of food. Another object for the sake of which he consents to exercise the same self-restraint is victory in war. Not only the warrior in the field but his friends at home will often bridle their sensual appetites from a belief that by so doing they will the more easily overcome their enemies. The fallacy of such a belief, like the belief that the chastity of the sower conduces to the growth of the seed, is plain enough to us; yet perhaps the self-restraint which these and the like beliefs, vain and false as they are, have imposed on mankind, has not been without its utility in bracing and strengthening the breed. For strength of character in the race as in the individual consists mainly in the power of sacrificing the present to the future,

of disregarding the immediate temptations of ephemeral pleasure for more distant and lasting sources of satisfaction. The more the power is exercised the higher and stronger becomes the character; till the height of heroism is reached in men who renounce the pleasures of life and even life itself for the sake of keeping or winning for others, perhaps in distant ages, the blessings of freedom and truth.

LXXX

SUPERSTITION AT THE BAR[1]

We are apt to think of superstition as an unmitigated evil, false in itself and pernicious in its consequences. That it has done much harm in the world, cannot be denied. It has sacrificed countless lives, wasted untold treasures, embroiled nations, severed friends, parted husbands and wives, parents and children, putting swords, and worse than swords, between them: it has filled gaols and madhouses with its innocent or deluded victims: it has broken many hearts, embittered the whole of many a life, and not content with persecuting the living it has pursued the dead into the grave and beyond it, gloating over the horrors which its foul imagination has conjured up to appal and torture the survivors. It has done all this and more. Yet the case of superstition, like that of Mr. Pickwick after the revelations of poor Mr. Winkle in the witness-box, can perhaps afford to be placed in a rather better light; and without posing as the Devil's Advocate or appearing before you in

[1] *Psyche's Task*[2], pp. 3-5.

a blue flame and sulphureous fumes,[1] I do profess to make out what the charitable might call a plausible plea for a very dubious client. For I propose to prove, or at least make probable, by examples that among certain races and at certain stages of evolution some social institutions which we all, or most of us, believe to be beneficial have partially rested on a basis of superstition. The institutions to which I refer are purely secular or civil. Of religious or ecclesiastical institutions I shall say nothing. It might perhaps be possible to show that even religion has not wholly escaped the taint or dispensed with the support of superstition ; but I prefer for to-night to confine myself to those civil institutions which people commonly imagine to be bottomed on nothing but hard common sense and the nature of things. While the institutions with which I shall deal have all survived into civilized society and can no doubt be defended by solid and weighty arguments, it is practically certain that among savages, and even among peoples who have risen above the level of savagery, these very same institutions have derived much of their strength from beliefs which nowadays we should condemn unreservedly as superstitious and absurd. The institutions in regard to which I shall attempt to prove this are four, namely, government, private property, marriage, and the respect for human life.

Before putting in this plea for superstition, I wish to make two remarks, which I beg you will bear in mind. First, in what I have to say I shall confine myself to certain races of men and to certain ages of

[1] This plea for Superstition was spoken at a Friday evening meeting of the Royal Institution, London.

history, because neither my time nor my knowledge permits me to speak of all races of men and all ages of history. How far the limited conclusions which I shall draw for some races and for some ages are applicable to others must be left to future inquiries to determine. That is my first remark. My second is this. If it can be proved that in certain races and at certain times the institutions in question have been based partly on superstition, it by no means follows that even among these races they have never been based on anything else. On the contrary, as all the institutions which I shall consider have proved themselves stable and permanent, there is a strong presumption that they rest mainly on something much more solid than superstition. No institution founded wholly on superstition, that is on falsehood, can be permanent. If it does not answer to some real human need, if its foundations are not laid broad and deep in the nature of things, it must perish, and the sooner the better. That is my second remark.

LXXXI

SUMMING UP FOR THE DEFENCE: SENTENCE OF DEATH [1]

To sum up this brief review of the influence which superstition has exercised on the growth of institutions, I think I have shown, or at least made probable :—

1. That among certain races and at certain times superstition has strengthened the respect for government, especially monarchical government, and has

[1] *Psyche's Task*[2], pp. 154-156.

thereby contributed to the establishment and maintenance of civil order:

2. That among certain races and at certain times superstition has strengthened the respect for private property and has thereby contributed to the security of its enjoyment:

3. That among certain races and at certain times superstition has strengthened the respect for marriage and has thereby contributed to a stricter observance of the rules of sexual morality both among the married and the unmarried:

4. That among certain races and at certain times superstition has strengthened the respect for human life and has thereby contributed to the security of its enjoyment.

But government, private property, marriage, and respect for human life are the pillars on which rests the whole fabric of civil society. Shake them and you shake society to its foundations. Therefore if government, private property, marriage, and respect for human life are all good and essential to the very existence of civil society, then it follows that by strengthening every one of them superstition has rendered a great service to humanity. It has supplied multitudes with a motive, a wrong motive it is true, for right action; and surely it is better, far better, for the world that men should do right from wrong motives than that they should do wrong with the best intentions. What concerns society is conduct, not opinion: if only our actions are just and good, it matters not a straw to others whether our opinions be mistaken. The danger of false opinion, and it is a most serious one, is that it commonly leads to wrong action; hence it is unquestionably a great evil and every effort should be

made to correct it. But of the two evils wrong action is in itself infinitely worse than false opinion ; and all systems of religion or philosophy which lay more stress on right opinion than on right action, which exalt orthodoxy above virtue, are so far immoral and prejudicial to the best interests of mankind : they invert the true relative importance, the real ethical value, of thought and action, for it is by what we do, not by what we think, that we are useful or useless, beneficent or maleficent to our fellows. As a body of false opinions, therefore, superstition is indeed a most dangerous guide in practice, and the evils which it has wrought are incalculable. But vast as are these evils, they ought not to blind us to the benefit which superstition has conferred on society by furnishing the ignorant, the weak, and the foolish with a motive, bad though it be, for good conduct. It is a reed, a broken reed, which has yet supported the steps of many a poor erring brother, who but for it might have stumbled and fallen. It is a light, a dim and wavering light, which, if it has lured many a mariner on the breakers, has yet guided some wanderers on life's troubled sea into a haven of rest and peace. Once the harbour lights are passed and the ship is in port, it matters little whether the pilot steered by a Jack-o'-lantern or by the stars.

That, ladies and gentlemen, is my plea for Superstition. Perhaps it might be urged in mitigation of the sentence which will be passed on the hoary-headed offender when he stands at the judgement bar. Yet the sentence, do not doubt it, is death. But it will not be executed in our time. There will be a long, long reprieve. It is as his advocate, not as his executioner, that I have appeared before you to-night.

At Athens cases of murder were tried before the Areopagus by night, and it is by night that I have spoken in defence of this power of darkness. But it grows late, and with my sinister client I must vanish before the cocks crow and the morning breaks grey in the east.

PART III

MAN AND THE SUPERNATURAL

LXXXII

THE ORIGIN OF MAN'S CONCEPTION OF GOD [1]

If we are indeed to discover the origin of man's conception of God, it is not sufficient to analyse the ideas which the educated and enlightened portion of mankind entertain on the subject at the present day; for in great measure these ideas are traditional, they have been handed down with little or no independent reflection or inquiry from generation to generation; hence in order to detect them in their inception it becomes necessary to push our analysis far back into the past. Large materials for such an historical inquiry are provided for us in the literature of ancient nations which, though often sadly mutilated and imperfect, has survived to modern times and throws much precious light on the religious beliefs and practices of the people who created it. But the ancients themselves inherited a great part of their religion from their prehistoric ancestors, and accordingly it becomes desirable to investigate the religious notions of these remote forefathers of mankind, since in them we may hope at last to arrive at the ultimate source, the historical origin, of the whole long development.

But how can this be done? how can we investigate

[1] *The Belief in Immortality*, vol. i. pp. 5-7.

the ideas of peoples who, ignorant of writing, had no means of permanently recording their beliefs? At first sight the thing seems impossible; the thread of inquiry is broken off short; it has landed us on the brink of a gulf which looks impassable. But the case is not so hopeless as it appears. True, we cannot investigate the beliefs of prehistoric ages directly, but the comparative method of research may furnish us with the means of studying them indirectly; it may hold up to us a mirror in which, if we do not see the originals, we may perhaps contemplate their reflections. For a comparative study of the various races of mankind demonstrates, or at least renders it highly probable, that humanity has everywhere started at an exceedingly low level of culture, a level far beneath that of the lowest existing savages, and that from this humble beginning all the various races of men have gradually progressed upward at different rates, some faster and some slower, till they have attained the particular stage which each of them occupies at the present time.

If this conclusion is correct, the various stages of savagery and barbarism on which many tribes and peoples now stand represent, broadly speaking, so many degrees of retarded social and intellectual development, they correspond to similar stages which the ancestors of the civilized races may be supposed to have passed through at more or less remote periods of their history. Thus when we arrange all the known peoples of the world according to the degree of their savagery or civilization in a graduated scale of culture, we obtain not merely a comparative view of their relative positions in the scale, but also in some measure an historical record of the genetic development of culture from a very early time down to the present day. Hence

a study of the savage and barbarous races of mankind is of the greatest importance for a full understanding of the beliefs and practices, whether religious, social, moral, or political, of the most civilized races, including our own, since it is practically certain that a large part of these beliefs and practices originated with our savage ancestors, and has been inherited by us from them, with more or less of modification, through a long line of intermediate generations.

That is why the study of existing savages at the present day engrosses so much of the attention of civilized peoples. We see that if we are to comprehend not only our past history but our present condition, with all its many intricate and perplexing problems, we must begin at the beginning by attempting to discover the mental state of our savage forefathers, who bequeathed to us so much of the faiths, the laws, and the institutions which we still cherish ; and more and more men are coming to perceive that the only way open to us of doing this effectually is to study the mental state of savages who to this day occupy a state of culture analogous to that of our rude progenitors. Through contact with civilization these savages are now rapidly disappearing, or at least losing the old habits and ideas which render them a document of priceless historical value for us. Hence we have every motive for prosecuting the study of savagery with ardour and diligence before it is too late, before the record is gone for ever. We are like an heir whose title-deeds must be scrutinized before he can take possession of the inheritance, but who finds the handwriting of the deeds so fading and evanescent that it threatens to disappear entirely before he can read the document to the end. With

what keen attention, what eager haste, would he not scan the fast-vanishing characters? With the like attention and the like haste civilized men are now applying themselves to the investigation of the fast-vanishing savages.

Thus if we are to trace historically man's conception of God to its origin, it is desirable, or rather essential, that we should begin by studying the most primitive ideas on the subject which are accessible to us, and the most primitive ideas are unquestionably those of the lowest savages. For a similar reason the study of inorganic chemistry naturally precedes the study of organic chemistry, because inorganic compounds are much simpler and therefore more easily analysed and investigated than organic compounds. So with the chemistry of the mind; we should analyse the comparatively simple phenomena of savage thought into its constituent elements before we attempt to perform a similar operation on the vastly more complex phenomena of civilized beliefs.

LXXXIII

RUDIMENTARY NOTION OF GOD AMONG MANY SAVAGES[1]

Much of the controversy which has raged as to the religion of the lower races has sprung merely from a mutual misunderstanding. The savage does not understand the thoughts of the civilized man, and few civilized men understand the thoughts of the savage. When the savage uses his word for god, he has in his mind a being of a certain sort: when

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part I. *The Magic Art*, vol. i. pp. 375-376.

the civilized man uses his word for god, he has in his mind a being of a very different sort; and if, as commonly happens, the two men are equally unable to place themselves at the other's point of view, nothing but confusion and mistakes can result from their discussions. If we civilized men insist on limiting the name of God to that particular conception of the divine nature which we ourselves have formed, then we must confess that the savage has no god at all. But we shall adhere more closely to the facts of history if we allow most of the higher savages at least to possess a rudimentary notion of certain supernatural beings who may fittingly be called gods, though not in the full sense in which we use the word. That rudimentary notion represents in all probability the germ out of which the civilized peoples have gradually evolved their own high conceptions of deity; and if we could trace the whole course of religious development, we might find that the chain which links our idea of the Godhead with that of the savage is one and unbroken.

LXXXIV

NATURAL THEOLOGY [1]

If there is such a thing as natural theology, that is, a knowledge of a God or gods acquired by our natural faculties alone without the aid of a special revelation, it follows that it must be obtained by one or other of the methods by which all our natural knowledge is conveyed to us. Roughly speaking, these methods are two in number, namely, intuition and experience.

[1] *The Belief in Immortality*, vol. i. pp. 11-23.

Now if we ask ourselves, Do we know God intuitively in the same sense in which we know intuitively our own sensations and the simplest truths of mathematics, I think most men will acknowledge that they do not. It is true that according to Berkeley the world exists only as it is perceived, and that our perceptions of it are produced by the immediate action of God on our minds, so that everything we perceive might be described, if not as an idea in the mind of the deity, at least as a direct emanation from him. On this theory we might in a sense be said to have an immediate knowledge of God. But Berkeley's theory has found little acceptance, so far as I know, even among philosophers ; and even if we regarded it as true, we should still have to admit that the knowledge of God implied by it is inferential rather than intuitive in the strict sense of the word : we infer God to be the cause of our perceptions rather than identify him with the perceptions themselves. On the whole, then, I conclude that man, or at all events the ordinary man, has, properly speaking, no immediate or intuitive knowledge of God, and that, if he obtains, without the aid of revelation, any knowledge of him at all, it can only be through the other natural channel of knowledge, that is, through experience.

In experience, as distinct from intuition, we reach our conclusions not directly through simple contemplation of the particular sensations, emotions, or ideas of which we are at the moment conscious, but indirectly by calling up before the imagination and comparing with each other our memories of a variety of sensations, emotions, or ideas of which we have been conscious in the past, and by selecting or abstracting from the mental images so compared the points in

which they resemble each other. The points of resemblance thus selected or abstracted from a number of particulars compose what we call an abstract or general idea, and from a comparison of such abstract or general ideas with each other we arrive at general conclusions, which define the relations of the ideas to each other. Experience in general consists in the whole body of conclusions thus deduced from a comparison of all the particular sensations, emotions, and ideas which make up the conscious life of the individual. Hence in order to constitute experience the mind has to perform a more or less complex series of operations, which are commonly referred to certain mental faculties, such as memory, imagination, and judgement. This analysis of experience does not pretend to be philosophically complete or exact; but perhaps it is sufficiently accurate for the purpose of the present inquiry, the scope of which is not philosophical but historical.

Now experience in the widest sense of the word may be conveniently distinguished into two sorts, the experience of our own mind and the experience of an external world. The distinction is indeed, like the others with which I am dealing at present, rather practically useful than theoretically sound; certainly it would not be granted by all philosophers, for many of them have held that we neither have nor with our present faculties can possibly attain to any immediate knowledge or perception of an external world, we merely infer its existence from our own sensations, which are as strictly a part of our mind as the ideas and emotions of our waking life or the visions of sleep. According to them, the existence of matter or of an external world is, so far as we are concerned, merely

an hypothesis devised to explain the order of our sensations; it never has been perceived by any man, woman, or child who ever lived on earth; we have and can have no immediate knowledge or perception of anything but the states and operations of our own mind. On this theory what we call the world, with all its supposed infinitudes of space and time, its systems of suns and planets, its seemingly endless forms of inorganic matter and organic life, shrivels up, on a close inspection, into a fleeting, a momentary figment of thought. It is like one of those glass baubles, iridescent with a thousand varied and delicate hues, which a single touch suffices to shatter into dust. The philosopher, like the sorcerer, has but to wave his magic wand,

> "And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep."

It would be beyond my province, even if it were within my power, to discuss these airy speculations, and thereby to descend into the arena where for ages subtle dialecticians have battled with each other over the reality or unreality of an external world. For my purpose it suffices to adopt the popular and convenient distinction of mind and matter and hence to divide experience into two sorts, an inward experience of the acts and states of our own minds, and an outward experience of the acts and states of that physical universe by which we seem to be surrounded.

Now if a natural knowledge of God is only possible

by means of experience, in other words, by a process of reasoning based on observation, it will follow that such a knowledge may conceivably be acquired either by the way of inward or of outward experience; in other words, it may be attained either by reflecting on the processes of our own minds or by observing the processes of external nature. In point of fact, if we survey the history of thought, mankind appears to have arrived at a knowledge, or at all events at a conception, of deity by both these roads. Let me say a few words as to the two roads which lead, or seem to lead, man to God.

In the first place, then, men in many lands and many ages have experienced certain extraordinary emotions and entertained certain extraordinary ideas, which, unable to account for them by reference to the ordinary forms of experience, they have set down to the direct action of a powerful spirit or deity working on their minds and even entering into and taking possession of their bodies; and in this excited state—for violent excitement is characteristic of these manifestations—the patient believes himself to be possessed of supernatural knowledge and supernatural power. This real or supposed mode of apprehending a divine spirit and entering into communion with it, is commonly and appropriately called inspiration. The phenomenon is familiar to us from the example of the Hebrew nation, who believed that their prophets were thus inspired by the deity, and that their sacred books were regularly composed under the divine afflatus. The belief is by no means singular, indeed it appears to be world-wide; for it would be hard to point to any race of men among whom instances of such inspiration have not been reported; and the more ignorant and

savage the race the more numerous, to judge by the reports, are the cases of inspiration. Volumes might be filled with examples, but through the spread of information as to the lower races in recent years the topic has become so familiar that I need not stop to illustrate it by instances. I will merely say that among savages the theory of inspiration or possession is commonly invoked to explain all abnormal mental states, particularly insanity or conditions of mind bordering on it, so that persons more or less crazed in their wits, and particularly hysterical or epileptic patients, are for that very reason thought to be peculiarly favoured by the spirits and are therefore consulted as oracles, their wild and whirling words passing for the revelations of a higher power, whether a god or a ghost, who considerately screens his too dazzling light under a thick veil of dark sayings and mysterious ejaculations. I need hardly point out the very serious dangers which menace any society where such theories are commonly held and acted upon. If the decisions of a whole community in matters of the gravest importance are left to turn on the wayward fancies, the whims and vagaries of the insane or the semi-insane, what are likely to be the consequences to the commonwealth? What, for example, can be expected to result from a war entered upon at such dictation and waged under such auspices? Are cattle-breeding, agriculture, commerce, all the arts of life on which a people depend for their subsistence, likely to thrive when they are directed by the ravings of epilepsy or the drivellings of hysteria? Defeat in battle, conquest by enemies, death by famine and widespread disease, these and a thousand other lesser evils threaten the blind people who commit themselves to such blind

guides. The history of savage and barbarous tribes, could we follow it throughout, might furnish us with a thousand warning instances of the fatal effects of carrying out this crude theory of inspiration to its logical conclusions; and if we hear less than might be expected of such instances, it is probably because the tribes who consistently acted up to their beliefs have thereby wiped themselves out of existence: they have perished the victims of their folly and left no record behind. I believe that historians have not yet reckoned sufficiently with the disastrous influence which this worship of insanity—for it is often nothing less—has exercised on the fortunes of peoples and on the development or decay of their institutions.

To a certain extent, however, the evil has provided its own remedy. For men of strong heads and ambitious temper, perceiving the exorbitant power which a belief in inspiration places in the hands of the feeble-minded, have often feigned to be similarly afflicted, and trading on their reputation for imbecility, or rather inspiration, have acquired an authority over their fellows which, though they have often abused it for vulgar ends, they have sometimes exerted for good, as for example by giving sound advice in matters of public concern, applying salutary remedies to the sick, and detecting and punishing crime, whereby they have helped to preserve the commonwealth, to alleviate suffering, and to cement that respect for law and order which is essential to the stability of society, and without which any community must fall to pieces like a house of cards. These great services have been rendered to the cause of civilization and progress by the class of men who in primitive society are variously known as medicine-men, magicians,

sorcerers, diviners, soothsayers, and so forth. Sometimes the respect which they have gained by the exercise of their profession has won for them political as well as spiritual or ghostly authority; in short, from being simple medicine-men or sorcerers they have grown into chiefs and kings. When such men, seated on the throne of state, retain their old reputation for being the vehicles of a divine spirit, they may be worshipped in the character of gods as well as revered in the capacity of kings; and thus exerting a twofold sway over the minds of men they possess a most potent instrument for elevating or depressing the fortunes of their worshippers and subjects. In this way the old savage notion of inspiration or possession gradually develops into the doctrine of the divinity of kings, which after a long period of florescence dwindles away into the modest theory that kings reign by divine right, a theory familiar to our ancestors not long ago, and perhaps not wholly obsolete among us even now. However, inspired men need not always blossom out into divine kings; they may, and often do, remain in the chrysalis state of simple deities revered by their simple worshippers, their brows encircled indeed with a halo of divinity but not weighted with the more solid substance of a kingly crown. Thus certain extraordinary mental states, which those who experience and those who witness them cannot account for in any other way, are often explained by the supposed interposition of a spirit or deity. This, therefore, is one of the two forms of experience by which men attain, or imagine that they attain, to a knowledge of God and a communion with him. It is what I have called the road of inward experience. Let us now glance at the other

form of experience which leads, or seems to lead, to the same goal. It is what I have called the road of outward experience.

When we contemplate the seemingly infinite variety, the endless succession, of events that pass under our observation in what we call the external world, we are led by an irresistible tendency to trace what we call a causal connexion between them. The tendency to discover the causes of things appears indeed to be innate in the constitution of our minds and indispensable to our continued existence. It is the link that arrests and colligates into convenient bundles the mass of particulars drifting pell-mell past on the stream of sensation ; it is the cement that binds into an edifice seemingly of adamant the loose sand of isolated perceptions. Deprived of the knowledge which this tendency appears to procure for us we should be powerless to foresee the succession of phenomena and so adapt ourselves to it. We should be bewildered by the apparent disorder and confusion of everything, we should toss on a sea without a rudder, we should wander in an endless maze without a clue, and finding no way out of it, or, in plain words, unable to avoid a single one of the dangers which menace us at every turn, we should inevitably perish. Accordingly the propensity to search for causes is characteristic of man in all ages and at all levels of culture, though without doubt it is far more highly developed in civilized than in savage communities. Among savages it is more or less unconscious and instinctive ; among civilized men it is deliberately cultivated and rewarded at least by the applause of their fellows, by the dignity, if not by the more solid recompenses, of learning. Indeed, as civilization progresses the

inquiry into causes tends to absorb more and more of the highest intellectual energies of a people; and an ever greater number of men, renouncing the bustle, the pleasures, and the ambitions of an active life, devote themselves exclusively to the pursuit of abstract truth; they set themselves to discover the causes of things, to trace the regularity and order that may be supposed to underlie the seemingly irregular, confused, and arbitrary sequence of phenomena. Unquestionably the progress of civilization owes much to the sustained efforts of such men, and if of late years and within our own memory the pace of progress has sensibly quickened, we shall perhaps not err in supposing that some part at least of the acceleration may be accounted for by an increase in the number of life-long students.

Now when we analyse the conception of a cause to the bottom, we find as the last residuum in our crucible nothing but what Hume found there long ago, and that is simply the idea of invariable sequence. Whenever we say that something is the cause of something else, all that we really mean is that the latter is invariably preceded by the former, so that whenever we find the second, which we call the effect, we may infer that the first, which we call the cause, has gone before it. All such inferences from effects to causes are based on experience; having observed a certain sequence of events a certain number of times, we conclude that the events are so conjoined that the latter cannot occur without the previous occurrence of the former. A single case of two events following each other could not of itself suggest that the one event is the cause of the other, since there is no necessary link between them in the mind; the sequence has

to be repeated more or less frequently before we infer a causal connexion between the two ; and this inference rests simply on that association of ideas which is established in our mind by the reiterated observation of the things. Once the ideas are by dint of repetition firmly welded together, the one by sheer force of habit calls up the other, and we say that the two things which are represented by those ideas stand to each other in the relation of cause and effect. The notion of causality is, in short, only one particular case of the association of ideas. Thus all reasoning as to causes implies previous observation : we reason from the observed to the unobserved, from the known to the unknown ; and the wider the range of our observation and knowledge, the greater the probability that our reasoning will be correct.

All this is as true of the savage as of the civilized man. He too argues, and indeed can only argue, on the basis of experience from the known to the unknown, from the observed to the hypothetical. But the range of his experience is comparatively narrow, and accordingly his inferences from it often appear to civilized men, with their wider knowledge, to be palpably false and absurd. This holds good most obviously in regard to his observation of external nature. While he often knows a good deal about the natural objects, whether animals, plants, or inanimate things, on which he is immediately dependent for his subsistence, the extent of country with which he is acquainted is commonly but small, and he has little or no opportunity of correcting the conclusions which he bases on his observation of it by a comparison with other parts of the world. But if he knows little of the outer world, he is necessarily

somewhat better acquainted with his own inner life, with his sensations and ideas, his emotions, appetites, and desires. Accordingly it is natural enough that when he seeks to discover the causes of events in the external world, he should, arguing from experience, imagine that these events are produced by the actions of invisible beings like himself, who behind the veil of nature pull the strings that set the vast machinery in motion. For example, he knows by experience that he can make sparks fly by knocking two flints against each other; what more natural, therefore, than that he should imagine the great sparks which we call lightning to be made in the same way by somebody up aloft, and that when he finds chipped flints on the ground he should take them for thunderstones dropped by the maker of thunder and lightning from the clouds? Thus arguing from his limited experience primitive man creates a multitude of spirits or gods in his own likeness to explain the succession of phenomena in nature of whose true causes he is ignorant; in short, he personifies the phenomena as powerful anthropomorphic spirits, and believing himself to be more or less dependent on their good will he woos their favour by prayer and sacrifice. This personification of the various aspects of external nature is one of the most fruitful sources of polytheism. The spirits and gods created by this train of thought may be called spirits and gods of nature to distinguish them from the human gods, by which I mean the living men and women who are believed by their worshippers to be inspired or possessed by a divine spirit.

But as time goes on and men learn more about natu e, they commonly become dissatisfied with poly-

theism as an explanation of the world and gradually discard it. From one department of nature after another the gods are reluctantly or contemptuously dismissed and their provinces committed to the care of certain abstract ideas of ethers, atoms, molecules, and so forth, which, though just as imperceptible to human senses as their divine predecessors, are judged by prevailing opinion to discharge their duties with greater regularity and despatch, and are accordingly firmly installed on the vacant thrones amid the general applause of the more enlightened portion of mankind. Thus instead of being peopled with a noisy bustling crowd of full-blooded and picturesque deities, clothed in the graceful form and animated with the warm passions of humanity, the universe outside the narrow circle of our consciousness is now conceived as absolutely silent, colourless, and deserted. The cheerful sounds which we hear, the bright hues which we see, have no existence, we are told, in the external world : the voices of friends, the harmonies of music, the chime of falling waters, the solemn roll of ocean, the silver splendour of the moon, the golden glories of sunset, the verdure of summer woods, and the hectic tints of autumn—all these subsist only in our own minds, and if we imagine them to have any reality elsewhere, we deceive ourselves. In fact, the whole external world as perceived by us is one great illusion : if we gave the reins to fancy we might call it a mirage, a piece of witchery, conjured up by the spells of some unknown magician to bewilder poor ignorant humanity. Outside of ourselves there stretches away on every side an infinitude of space without sound, without light, without colour, a solitude traversed only in every direction by an inconceivably complex web of

silent and impersonal forces. That, if I understand it aright, is the general conception of the world which modern science has substituted for polytheism.

When philosophy and science by their combined efforts have ejected gods and goddesses from all the subordinate posts of nature, it might perhaps be expected that they would have no further occasion for the services of a deity, and that having relieved him of all his particular functions they would have arranged for the creation and general maintenance of the universe without him by handing over these important offices to an efficient staff of those ethers, atoms, corpuscles, and so forth, which had already proved themselves so punctual in the discharge of the minor duties entrusted to them. Nor, indeed, is this expectation altogether disappointed. A number of atheistical philosophers have courageously come forward and assured us that the hypothesis of a deity as the creator and preserver of the universe is quite superfluous, and that all things came into being or have existed from eternity without the help of any divine spirit, and that they will continue to exist without it to the end, if end indeed there is to be. But on the whole these daring speculators appear to be in a minority. The general opinion of educated people at the present day, could we ascertain it, would probably be found to incline to the conclusion that, though every department of nature is now worked by impersonal material forces alone, the universe as a whole was created and is still maintained by a great supernatural spirit whom we call God. Thus in Europe and in the countries which have borrowed their civilization, their philosophy, and their religion from it, the central problem of natural theology has narrowed itself down to the

question, Is there one God or none? It is a profound question, and I for one profess myself unable to answer it.

If this brief sketch of the history of natural theology is correct, man has by the exercise of his natural faculties alone, without the help of revelation, attained to a knowledge or at least to a conception of God in one of two ways, either by meditating on the operations of his own mind, or by observing the processes of external nature: inward experience and outward experience have conducted him by different roads to the same goal. By whichever of them the conception has been reached, it is regularly employed to explain the causal connexion of things, whether the things to be explained are the ideas and emotions of man himself or the changes in the physical world outside of him. In short, a God is always brought in to play the part of a cause; it is the imperious need of tracing the causes of events which has driven man to discover or invent a deity. Now causes may be arranged in two classes according as they are perceived or unperceived by the senses. For example, when we see the impact of a billiard cue on a billiard ball followed immediately by the motion of the ball, we say that the impact is the cause of the motion. In this case we perceive the cause as well as the effect. But when we see an apple fall from a tree to the ground, we say that the cause of the fall is the force of gravitation exercised by the superior mass of the earth on the inferior mass of the apple. In this case, though we perceive the effect, we do not perceive the cause, we only infer it by a process of reasoning from experience. Causes of the latter sort may be called inferential or hypothetical causes to distinguish them from those which are

perceived. Of the two classes of causes a deity belongs in general, if not universally, to the second, that is, to the inferential or hypothetical causes ; for as a rule at all events his existence is not perceived by our senses but inferred by our reason. To say that he has never appeared in visible and tangible form to men would be to beg the question ; it would be to make an assertion which is incapable of proof and which is contradicted by a multitude of contrary affirmations recorded in the traditions or the sacred books of many races ; but without being rash we may perhaps say that such appearances, if they ever took place, belong to a past order of events and need hardly be reckoned with at the present time. For all practical purposes, therefore, God is now a purely inferential or hypothetical cause ; he may be invoked to explain either our own thoughts and feelings, our impulses and emotions, or the manifold states and processes of external nature ; he may be viewed either as the inspirer of the one or the creator and preserver of the other ; and according as he is mainly regarded from the one point of view or the other, the conception of the divine nature tends to beget one of two very different types of piety. To the man who traces the finger of God in the workings of his own mind, the deity appears to be far closer than he seems to the man who only infers the divine existence from the marvellous order, harmony, and beauty of the external world ; and we need not wonder that the faith of the former is of a more fervent temper and supplies him with more powerful incentives to a life of active devotion than the calm and rational faith of the latter. We may conjecture that the piety of most great religious reformers has belonged to the former rather than to the latter type ; in other words,

that they have believed in God because they felt, or imagined that they felt, him stirring in their own hearts rather than because they discerned the handiwork of a divine artificer in the wonderful mechanism of nature.

LXXXV

THE AGE OF MAGIC [1]

If in the most backward state of human society now known to us we find magic conspicuously present and religion conspicuously absent, may we not reasonably conjecture that the civilized races of the world have also at some period of their history passed through a similar intellectual phase, that they attempted to force the great powers of nature to do their pleasure before they thought of courting their favour by offerings and prayer—in short that, just as on the material side of human culture there has everywhere been an Age of Stone, so on the intellectual side there has everywhere been an Age of Magic? There are reasons for answering this question in the affirmative. When we survey the existing races of mankind from Greenland to Tierra del Fuego, or from Scotland to Singapore, we observe that they are distinguished one from the other by a great variety of religions, and that these distinctions are not, so to speak, merely coterminous with the broad distinctions of race, but descend into the minuter subdivisions of states and commonwealths, nay, that they honeycomb the town, the village, and even the family, so that the surface of society all over the world is cracked and seamed,

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part I. *The Magic Art*, vol. i. pp. 234-237.

sapped and mined with rents and fissures and yawning crevasses opened up by the disintegrating influence of religious dissension. Yet when we have penetrated through these differences, which affect mainly the intelligent and thoughtful part of the community, we shall find underlying them all a solid stratum of intellectual agreement among the dull, the weak, the ignorant, and the superstitious, who constitute, unfortunately, the vast majority of mankind. One of the great achievements of the nineteenth century was to run shafts down into this low mental stratum in many parts of the world, and thus to discover its substantial identity everywhere. It is beneath our feet—and not very far beneath them—here in Europe at the present day, and it crops up on the surface in the heart of the Australian wilderness and wherever the advent of a higher civilization has not crushed it under ground. This universal faith, this truly Catholic creed, is a belief in the efficacy of magic. While religious systems differ not only in different countries, but in the same country in different ages, the system of sympathetic magic remains everywhere and at all times substantially alike in its principles and practice. Among the ignorant and superstitious classes of modern Europe it is very much what it was thousands of years ago in Egypt and India, and what it now is among the lowest savages surviving in the remotest corners of the world. If the test of truth lay in a show of hands or a counting of heads, the system of magic might appeal, with far more reason than the Catholic Church, to the proud motto, "*Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*", as the sure and certain credential of its own infallibility.

It is not our business here to consider what bearing the permanent existence of such a solid layer of savagery beneath the surface of society, and unaffected by the superficial changes of religion and culture, has upon the future of humanity. The dispassionate observer, whose studies have led him to plumb its depths, can hardly regard it otherwise than as a standing menace to civilization. We seem to move on a thin crust which may at any moment be rent by the subterranean forces slumbering below. From time to time a hollow murmur underground or a sudden spirt of flame into the air tells of what is going on beneath our feet. Now and then the polite world is startled by a paragraph in a newspaper which tells how in Scotland an image has been found stuck full of pins for the purpose of killing an obnoxious laird or minister, how a woman has been slowly roasted to death as a witch in Ireland, or how a girl has been murdered and chopped up in Russia to make those candles of human tallow by whose light thieves hope to pursue their midnight trade unseen. But whether the influences that make for further progress, or those that threaten to undo what has already been accomplished, will ultimately prevail ; whether the impulsive energy of the minority or the dead weight of the majority of mankind will prove the stronger force to carry us up to higher heights or to sink us into lower depths, are questions rather for the sage, the moralist, and the statesman, whose eagle vision scans the future, than for the humble student of the present and the past. Here we are only concerned to ask how far the uniformity, the universality, and the permanence of a belief in magic, compared with the endless variety and the shifting character of religious

creeds, raises a presumption that the former represents a ruder and earlier phase of the human mind, through which all the races of mankind have passed or are passing on their way to religion and science.

LXXXVI

THE PRINCIPLES OF MAGIC[1]

If we analyse the principles of thought on which magic is based, they will probably be found to resolve themselves into two: first, that like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause; and, second, that things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed. The former principle may be called the Law of Similarity, the latter the Law of Contact or Contagion. From the first of these principles, namely the Law of Similarity, the magician infers that he can produce any effect he desires merely by imitating it: from the second he infers that whatever he does to a material object will affect equally the person with whom the object was once in contact, whether it formed part of his body or not. Charms based on the Law of Similarity may be called Homoeopathic or Imitative Magic. Charms based on the Law of Contact or Contagion may be called Contagious Magic. To denote the first of these branches of magic the term Homoeopathic is perhaps preferable, for the alternative term Imitative or Mimetic suggests, if it does not imply, a conscious agent who imitates, thereby

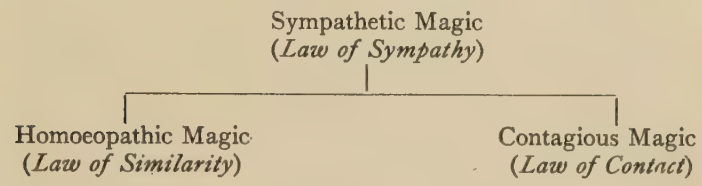
[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part I. *The Magic Art*, vol. i. pp. 52-54.

limiting the scope of magic too narrowly. For the same principles which the magician applies in the practice of his art are implicitly believed by him to regulate the operations of inanimate nature; in other words, he tacitly assumes that the Laws of Similarity and Contact are of universal application and are not limited to human actions. In short, magic is a spurious system of natural law as well as a fallacious guide of conduct; it is a false science as well as an abortive art. Regarded as a system of natural law, that is, as a statement of the rules which determine the sequence of events throughout the world, it may be called Theoretical Magic: regarded as a set of precepts which human beings observe in order to compass their ends, it may be called Practical Magic. At the same time it is to be borne in mind that the primitive magician knows magic only on its practical side; he never analyses the mental processes on which his practice is based, never reflects on the abstract principles involved in his actions. With him, as with the vast majority of men, logic is implicit, not explicit: he reasons just as he digests his food in complete ignorance of the intellectual and physiological processes which are essential to the one operation and to the other. In short, to him magic is always an art, never a science; the very idea of science is lacking in his undeveloped mind. It is for the philosophic student to trace the train of thought which underlies the magician's practice; to draw out the few simple threads of which the tangled skein is composed; to disengage the abstract principles from their concrete applications; in short, to discern the spurious science behind the bastard art.

If my analysis of the magician's logic is correct,

its two great principles turn out to be merely two different misapplications of the association of ideas. Homoeopathic magic is founded on the association of ideas by similarity; contagious magic is founded on the association of ideas by contiguity. Homoeopathic magic commits the mistake of assuming that things which resemble each other are the same: contagious magic commits the mistake of assuming that things which have once been in contact with each other are always in contact. But in practice the two branches are often combined; or, to be more exact, while homoeopathic or imitative magic may be practised by itself, contagious magic will generally be found to involve an application of the homoeopathic or imitative principle. Thus generally stated the two things may be a little difficult to grasp, but they will readily become intelligible when they are illustrated by particular examples. Both trains of thought are in fact extremely simple and elementary. It could hardly be otherwise, since they are familiar in the concrete, though certainly not in the abstract, to the crude intelligence not only of the savage, but of ignorant and dull-witted people everywhere. Both branches of magic, the homoeopathic and the contagious, may conveniently be comprehended under the general name of Sympathetic Magic, since both assume that things act on each other at a distance through a secret sympathy, the impulse being transmitted from one to the other by means of what we may conceive as a kind of invisible ether, not unlike that which is postulated by modern science for a precisely similar purpose, namely, to explain how things can physically affect each other through a space which appears to be empty.

It may be convenient to tabulate as follows the branches of magic according to the laws of thought which underlie them :



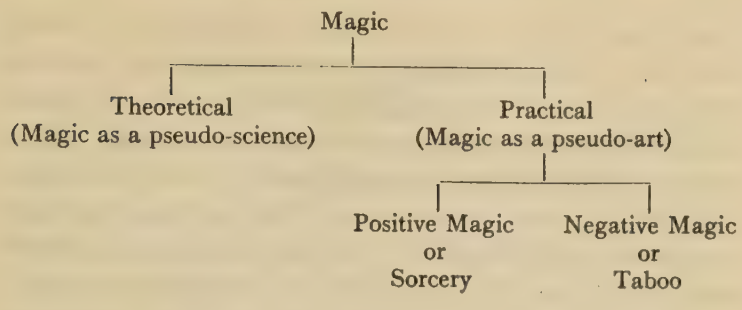
LXXXVII

NEGATIVE MAGIC[1]

The system of sympathetic magic is not merely composed of positive precepts ; it comprises a very large number of negative precepts, that is, prohibitions. It tells you not merely what to do, but also what to leave undone. The positive precepts are charms : the negative precepts are taboos. In fact, the whole doctrine of taboo, or at all events a large part of it, would seem to be only a special application of sympathetic magic, with its two great laws of similarity and contact. Though these laws are certainly not formulated in so many words nor even conceived in the abstract by the savage, they are nevertheless implicitly believed by him to regulate the course of nature quite independently of human will. He thinks that if he acts in a certain way, certain consequences will inevitably follow in virtue of one or other of these laws ; and if the consequences of a particular act appear to him likely to prove disagreeable or dangerous, he is naturally careful not to act in that way lest he should

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part I. *The Magic Art*, vol. i. pp. 111-113.

incur them. In other words, he abstains from doing that which, in accordance with his mistaken notions of cause and effect, he falsely believes would injure him; in short, he subjects himself to a taboo. Thus taboo is so far a negative application of practical magic. Positive magic or sorcery says, "Do this in order that so and so may happen." Negative magic or taboo says, "Do not do this, lest so and so should happen." The aim of positive magic or sorcery is to produce a desired event; the aim of negative magic or taboo is to avoid an undesirable one. But both consequences, the desirable and the undesirable, are supposed to be brought about in accordance with the laws of similarity and contact. And just as the desired consequence is not really effected by the observance of a magical ceremony, so the dreaded consequence does not really result from the violation of a taboo. If the supposed evil necessarily followed a breach of taboo, the taboo would not be a taboo but a precept of morality or common sense. It is not a taboo to say, "Do not put your hand in the fire"; it is a rule of common sense, because the forbidden action entails a real, not an imaginary evil. In short, those negative precepts which we call taboo are just as vain and futile as those positive precepts which we call sorcery. The two things are merely opposite sides or poles of one great disastrous fallacy, a mistaken conception of the association of ideas. Of that fallacy, sorcery is the positive, and taboo the negative pole. If we give the general name of magic to the whole erroneous system, both theoretical and practical, then taboo may be defined as the negative side of practical magic. To put this in tabular form:



LXXXVIII

MAGICAL TELEPATHY [1]

Whatever doubts science may entertain as to the possibility of action at a distance, magic has none; faith in telepathy is one of its first principles. A modern advocate of the influence of mind upon mind at a distance would have no difficulty in convincing a savage; the savage believed in it long ago, and what is more, he acted on his belief with a logical consistency such as his civilized brother in the faith has not yet, so far as I am aware, exhibited in his conduct. For the savage is convinced not only that magical ceremonies affect persons and things afar off, but that the simplest acts of daily life may do so too. Hence on important occasions the behaviour of friends and relations at a distance is often regulated by a more or less elaborate code of rules, the neglect of which by the one set of persons would, it is supposed, entail misfortune or even death on the absent ones. In particular when a party of men are out hunting or fighting, their kinsfolk at home are often expected to do certain things or to abstain from doing certain others, for the sake of ensuring the safety and success of the distant hunters or warriors.

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part I. *The Magic Art*, vol. i. pp. 119-120.

LXXXIX

THE PROHIBITION OF IMAGES AMONG THE HEBREWS [1]

We may suspect that the use which magicians make of images in order to compel the beings represented by them, whether animals or men or gods, to work their will, was the real practice which the Hebrew legislator had in view when he penned the commandment: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them." The theory of Renan, that this commandment had no deeper foundation than the reluctance which a tribe of nomadic herdsmen would naturally feel to encumber themselves and their beasts with a useless load of images on their wanderings, seems scarcely a sufficient explanation. Why solemnly forbid men to do what a simple regard for their own personal comfort and convenience would of itself prevent them from doing? On the other hand, magicians of old really believed that by their magical images, their ceremonies and incantations, they could compel the gods to obey them; and in ancient Egypt, for example, this belief did not remain a mere theological dogma, it was logically carried out in practice for the purpose of wringing from a deity boons which he would only stand and deliver on compulsion. These black arts of their powerful neighbours were doubtless familiar to the Hebrews, and may have found many

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. iv. p. 26.

imitators among them. But to deeply religious minds, imbued with a profound sense of the divine majesty and goodness, these attempts to take heaven by storm must have appeared the rankest blasphemy and impiety; we need not wonder therefore that a severe prohibition of all such nefarious practices should have found a prominent place in the earliest Hebrew code.

XC

BENEFITS ACCRUING FROM THE RISE OF PUBLIC MAGICIANS[1]

In primitive society, where uniformity of occupation is the rule, and the distribution of the community into various classes of workers has hardly begun, every man is more or less his own magician; he practises charms and incantations for his own good and the injury of his enemies. But a great step in advance has been taken when a special class of magicians has been instituted; when, in other words, a number of men have been set apart for the express purpose of benefiting the whole community by their skill, whether that skill be directed to the healing of diseases, the forecasting of the future, the regulation of the weather, or any other object of general utility. The impotence of the means adopted by most of these practitioners to accomplish their ends ought not to blind us to the immense importance of the institution itself. Here is a body of men relieved, at least in the higher stages of savagery, from the need of earning their livelihood by hard manual toil, and allowed, nay, expected and encouraged, to prosecute researches into

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part I. *The Magic Art*, vol. i. pp. 245-247.

the secret ways of nature. It was at once their duty and their interest to know more than their fellows, to acquaint themselves with everything that could aid man in his arduous struggle with nature, everything that could mitigate his sufferings and prolong his life. The properties of drugs and minerals, the causes of rain and drought, of thunder and lightning, the changes of the seasons, the phases of the moon, the daily and yearly journeys of the sun, the motions of the stars, the mystery of life, and the mystery of death, all these things must have excited the wonder of these early philosophers, and stimulated them to find solutions of problems that were doubtless often thrust on their attention in the most practical form by the importunate demands of their clients, who expected them not merely to understand but to regulate the great processes of nature for the good of man. That their first shots fell very far wide of the mark could hardly be helped. The slow, the never-ending approach to truth consists in perpetually forming and testing hypotheses, accepting those which at the time seem to fit the facts and rejecting the others. The views of natural causation embraced by the savage magician no doubt appear to us manifestly false and absurd; yet in their day they were legitimate hypotheses, though they have not stood the test of experience. Ridicule and blame are the just meed, not of those who devised these crude theories, but of those who obstinately adhered to them after better had been propounded. Certainly no men ever had stronger incentives in the pursuit of truth than these savage sorcerers. To maintain at least a show of knowledge was absolutely necessary; a single mistake detected might cost them their life. This no doubt led them to

practise imposture for the purpose of concealing their ignorance; but it also supplied them with the most powerful motive for substituting a real for a sham knowledge, since, if you would appear to know anything, by far the best way is actually to know it. Thus, however justly we may reject the extravagant pretensions of magicians and condemn the deceptions which they have practised on mankind, the original institution of this class of men has, take it all in all, been productive of incalculable good to humanity. They were the direct predecessors, not merely of our physicians and surgeons, but of our investigators and discoverers in every branch of natural science. They began the work which has since been carried to such glorious and beneficent issues by their successors in after ages; and if the beginning was poor and feeble, this is to be imputed to the inevitable difficulties which beset the path of knowledge rather than to the natural incapacity or wilful fraud of the men themselves.

XCI

THE MAGICIAN'S PROGRESS [1]

We have now concluded our examination of the general principles of sympathetic magic. The examples by which I have illustrated them have been drawn for the most part from what may be called private magic, that is, from magical rites and incantations practised for the benefit or the injury of individuals. But in savage society there is commonly to be found in addition what we may call public magic, that is, sorcery practised for the benefit of the whole

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part I. *The Magic Art*, vol. i. pp. 214-219.

community. Wherever ceremonies of this sort are observed for the common good, it is obvious that the magician ceases to be merely a private practitioner and becomes to some extent a public functionary. The development of such a class of functionaries is of great importance for the political as well as the religious evolution of society. For when the welfare of the tribe is supposed to depend on the performance of these magical rites, the magician rises into a position of much influence and repute, and may readily acquire the rank and authority of a chief or king. The profession accordingly draws into its ranks some of the ablest and most ambitious men of the tribe, because it holds out to them a prospect of honour, wealth, and power such as hardly any other career could offer. The acuter minds perceive how easy it is to dupe their weaker brother and to play on his superstition for their own advantage. Not that the sorcerer is always a knave and impostor; he is often sincerely convinced that he really possesses those wonderful powers which the credulity of his fellows ascribes to him. But the more sagacious he is, the more likely he is to see through the fallacies which impose on duller wits. Thus the ablest members of the profession must tend to be more or less conscious deceivers; and it is just these men who in virtue of their superior ability will generally come to the top and win for themselves positions of the highest dignity and the most commanding authority. The pitfalls which beset the path of the professional sorcerer are many, and as a rule only the man of coolest head and sharpest wit will be able to steer his way through them safely. For it must always be remembered that every single profession and claim put forward by the magician as

such is false; not one of them can be maintained without deception, conscious or unconscious. Accordingly the sorcerer who sincerely believes in his own extravagant pretensions is in far greater peril and is much more likely to be cut short in his career than the deliberate impostor. The honest wizard always expects that his charms and incantations will produce their supposed effect; and when they fail, not only really, as they always do, but conspicuously and disastrously, as they often do, he is taken aback: he is not, like his knavish colleague, ready with a plausible excuse to account for the failure, and before he can find one he may be knocked on the head by his disappointed and angry employers.

The general result is that at this stage of social evolution the supreme power tends to fall into the hands of men of the keenest intelligence and the most unscrupulous character. If we could balance the harm they do by their knavery against the benefits they confer by their superior sagacity, it might well be found that the good greatly outweighed the evil. For more mischief has probably been wrought in the world by honest fools in high places than by intelligent rascals. Once your shrewd rogue has attained the height of his ambition, and has no longer any selfish end to further, he may, and often does, turn his talents, his experience, his resources, to the service of the public. Many men who have been least scrupulous in the acquisition of power have been most beneficent in the use of it, whether the power they aimed at and won was that of wealth, political authority, or what not. In the field of politics the wily intriguer, the ruthless victor, may end by being a wise and magnanimous ruler, blessed in his lifetime,

lamented at his death, admired and applauded by posterity. Such men, to take two of the most conspicuous instances, were Julius Caesar and Augustus. But once a fool always a fool, and the greater the power in his hands the more disastrous is likely to be the use he makes of it. The heaviest calamity in English history, the breach with America, might never have occurred if George the Third had not been an honest dullard.

Thus, so far as the public profession of magic affected the constitution of savage society, it tended to place the control of affairs in the hands of the ablest man : it shifted the balance of power from the many to the one : it substituted a monarchy for a democracy, or rather for an oligarchy of old men ; for in general the savage community is ruled, not by the whole body of adult males, but by a council of elders. The change, by whatever causes produced, and whatever the character of the early rulers, was on the whole very beneficial. For the rise of monarchy appears to be an essential condition of the emergence of mankind from savagery. No human being is so hidebound by custom and tradition as your democratic savage ; in no state of society consequently is progress so slow and difficult. The old notion that the savage is the freest of mankind is the reverse of the truth. He is a slave, not indeed to a visible master, but to the past, to the spirits of his dead forefathers, who haunt his steps from birth to death, and rule him with a rod of iron. What they did is the pattern of right, the unwritten law to which he yields a blind unquestioning obedience. The least possible scope is thus afforded to superior talent to change old customs for the better. The ablest man is dragged down by the weakest and

dullest, who necessarily sets the standard, since he cannot rise, while the other can fall. The surface of such a society presents a uniform dead level, so far as it is humanly possible to reduce the natural inequalities, the immeasurable real differences of inborn capacity and temper, to a false superficial appearance of equality. From this low and stagnant condition of affairs, which demagogues and dreamers in later times have lauded as the ideal state, the Golden Age, of humanity, everything that helps to raise society by opening a career to talent and proportioning the degrees of authority to men's natural abilities, deserves to be welcomed by all who have the real good of their fellows at heart. Once these elevating influences have begun to operate—and they cannot be for ever suppressed—the progress of civilization becomes comparatively rapid. The rise of one man to supreme power enables him to carry through changes in a single lifetime which previously many generations might not have sufficed to effect; and if, as will often happen, he is a man of intellect and energy above the common, he will readily avail himself of the opportunity. Even the whims and caprices of a tyrant may be of service in breaking the chain of custom which lies so heavy on the savage. And as soon as the tribe ceases to be swayed by the timid and divided counsels of the elders, and yields to the direction of a single strong and resolute mind, it becomes formidable to its neighbours and enters on a career of aggrandizement, which at an early stage of history is often highly favourable to social, industrial, and intellectual progress. For extending its sway, partly by force of arms, partly by the voluntary submission of weaker tribes, the community soon acquires

wealth and slaves, both of which, by relieving some classes from the perpetual struggle for a bare subsistence, afford them an opportunity of devoting themselves to that disinterested pursuit of knowledge which is the noblest and most powerful instrument to ameliorate the lot of man.

Intellectual progress, which reveals itself in the growth of art and science and the spread of more liberal views, cannot be dissociated from industrial or economic progress, and that in its turn receives an immense impulse from conquest and empire. It is no mere accident that the most vehement outbursts of activity of the human mind have followed close on the heels of victory, and that the great conquering races of the world have commonly done most to advance and spread civilization, thus healing in peace the wounds they inflicted in war. The Babylonians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Arabs are our witnesses in the past: we may yet live to see a similar outburst in Japan. Nor, to remount the stream of history to its sources, is it an accident that all the first great strides towards civilization have been made under despotic and theocratic governments, like those of Egypt, Babylon, and Peru, where the supreme ruler claimed and received the servile allegiance of his subjects in the double character of a king and a god. It is hardly too much to say that at this early epoch despotism is the best friend of humanity and, paradoxical as it may sound, of liberty. For, after all, there is more liberty in the best sense — liberty to think our own thoughts and to fashion our own destinies — under the most absolute despotism, the most grinding tyranny, than under the apparent freedom of savage life, where the individual's lot is cast from the

cradle to the grave in the iron mould of hereditary custom.

So far, therefore, as the public profession of magic has been one of the roads by which the ablest men have passed to supreme power, it has contributed to emancipate mankind from the thraldom of tradition and to elevate them into a larger, freer life, with a broader outlook on the world. This is no small service rendered to humanity. And when we remember further that in another direction magic has paved the way for science, we are forced to admit that if the black art has done much evil, it has also been the source of much good ; that if it is the child of error, it has yet been the mother of freedom and truth.

XCII

THE REAL LEADERS OF MANKIND [1]

If we ask how it happens that superstitions linger among a people who in general have reached a higher level of culture, the answer is to be found in the natural, universal, and ineradicable inequality of men. Not only are different races differently endowed in respect of intelligence, courage, industry, and so forth, but within the same nation men of the same generation differ enormously in inborn capacity and worth. No abstract doctrine is more false and mischievous than that of the natural equality of men. It is true that the legislator must treat men as if they were equal, because laws of necessity are general and cannot be made so as to fit the infinite variety of individual cases. But we must not imagine that

[1] *The Scope of Social Anthropology*, pp. 166-168.

because men are equal before the law they are therefore intrinsically equal to each other. The experience of common life sufficiently contradicts such a vain imagination. At school and at the universities, at work and at play, in peace and in war, the mental and moral inequalities of human beings stand out too conspicuously to be ignored or disputed. On the whole the men of keenest intelligence and strongest characters lead the rest and shape the moulds into which, outwardly at least, society is cast. As such men are necessarily few by comparison with the multitude whom they lead, it follows that the community is really dominated by the will of an enlightened minority even in countries where the ruling power is nominally vested in the hands of the numerical majority. In fact, disguise it as we may, the government of mankind is always and everywhere essentially aristocratic. No juggling with political machinery can evade this law of nature. However it may seem to lead, the dull-witted majority in the end follows a keener-witted minority. That is its salvation and the secret of progress. The higher human intelligence sways the lower, just as the intelligence of man gives him the mastery over the brutes. I do not mean that the ultimate direction of society rests with its nominal governors, with its kings, its statesmen, its legislators. The true rulers of men are the thinkers who advance knowledge; for just as it is through his superior knowledge, not through his superior strength, that man bears rule over the rest of the animal creation, so among men themselves it is knowledge which in the long run directs and controls the forces of society. Thus the discoverers of new truths are the real though uncrowned and unsceptred

kings of mankind; monarchs, statesmen, and law-givers are but their ministers, who sooner or later do their bidding by carrying out the ideas of these master minds. The more we study the inward workings of society and the progress of civilization, the more clearly shall we perceive how both are governed by the influence of thoughts which, springing up at first we know not how or whence in a few superior minds, gradually spread till they have leavened the whole inert lump of a community or of mankind. The origin of such mental variations, with all their far-reaching train of social consequences, is just as obscure as is the origin of those physical variations on which, if biologists are right, depends the evolution of species, and with it the possibility of progress. Perhaps the same unknown cause which determines the one set of variations gives rise to the other also. We cannot tell. All we can say is that on the whole in the conflict of competing forces, whether physical or mental, the strongest at last prevails, the fittest survives. In the mental sphere the struggle for existence is not less fierce and internecine than in the physical, but in the end the better ideas, which we call the truth, carry the day. The clamorous opposition with which at their first appearance they are regularly greeted, whenever they conflict with old prejudices, may retard but cannot prevent their final victory. It is the practice of the mob first to stone and then to erect useless memorials to their greatest benefactors. All who set themselves to replace ancient error and superstition by truth and reason must lay their account with brickbats in their life and a marble monument after death.

XCIII

HUMAN GODS[1]

In savage or barbarous society there are often found men to whom the superstition of their fellows ascribes a controlling influence over the general course of nature. Such men are accordingly adored and treated as gods. Whether these human divinities also hold temporal sway over the lives and fortunes of their adorers, or whether their functions are purely spiritual and supernatural, in other words, whether they are kings as well as gods or only the latter, is a distinction which hardly concerns us here. Their supposed divinity is the essential fact with which we have to deal. In virtue of it they are a pledge and guarantee to their worshippers of the continuance and orderly succession of those physical phenomena upon which mankind depends for subsistence. Naturally, therefore, the life and health of such a god-man are matters of anxious concern to the people whose welfare and even existence are bound up with his; naturally he is constrained by them to conform to such rules as the wit of early man has devised for averting the ills to which flesh is heir, including the last ill, death. These rules are at bottom nothing but the maxims with which, on the primitive view, every man of common prudence must comply if he would live long in the land. But while in the case of ordinary men the observance of the rules is left to the choice of the individual, in the case of the god-man it is enforced

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part II. *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, pp. 419-421.

under penalty of dismissal from his high station, or even of death. For his worshippers have far too great a stake in his life to allow him to play fast and loose with it. Therefore all the quaint superstitions, the old-world maxims, the venerable saws which the ingenuity of savage philosophers elaborated long ago, and which old women at chimney corners still impart as treasures of great price to their descendants gathered round the cottage fire on winter evenings—all these antique fancies clustered, all these cobwebs of the brain were spun about the path of the old king, the human god, who, immeshed in them like a fly in the toils of a spider, could hardly stir a limb for the threads of custom, "light as air but strong as links of iron", that crossing and recrossing each other in an endless maze bound him fast within a network of observances from which death or deposition alone could release him.

Thus to students of the past the life of the old kings and priests teems with instruction. In it was summed up all that passed for wisdom when the world was young. It was the perfect pattern after which every man strove to shape his life; a faultless model constructed with rigorous accuracy upon the lines laid down by a barbarous philosophy. Crude and false as that philosophy may seem to us, it would be unjust to deny it the merit of logical consistency. Starting from a conception of the vital principle as a tiny being or soul existing in, but distinct and separable from, the living being, it deduces for the practical guidance of life a system of rules which in general hangs well together and forms a fairly complete and harmonious whole. The flaw—and it is a fatal one—of the system lies not in its reasoning, but in its

premises ; in its conception of the nature of life, not in any irrelevancy of the conclusions which it draws from that conception. But to stigmatize these premises as ridiculous because we can easily detect their falseness, would be ungrateful as well as unphilosophical.

XCIV

COMPULSORY KINGSHIPS [1]

In representing the succession to a throne as compulsory, certain stories may well preserve a reminiscence of a real custom. To us, indeed, who draw our ideas of kingship from the hereditary and highly privileged monarchies of civilized Europe, the notion of thrusting the crown upon reluctant strangers or common citizens of the lowest rank is apt to appear fantastic and absurd. But that is merely because we fail to perceive how widely the modern type of kingship has diverged from the ancient pattern. In early times the duties of sovereignty are more conspicuous than its privileges. At a certain stage of development the chief or king is rather the minister or servant than the ruler of his people. The sacred functions which he is expected to discharge are deemed essential to the welfare, and even the existence, of the community, and at any cost some one must be found to perform them. Yet the burdens and restrictions of all sorts incidental to the early kingship are such that not merely in popular tales, but in actual practice, compulsion has sometimes been found necessary to fill vacancies, while elsewhere the lack of candidates has caused the office to fall into abeyance, or even to be abolished altogether.

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part III. *The Dying God*, p. 135.

And where death stared the luckless monarch in the face at the end of a brief reign of a few months or days, we need not wonder that gaols had to be swept and the dregs of society raked to find a king.

Yet we should doubtless err if we supposed that under such hard conditions men could never be found ready and even eager to accept the sovereignty.

XCV

THE DIVINITY OF KINGS [1]

At a certain stage of early society the king or priest is often thought to be endowed with supernatural powers or to be an incarnation of a deity, and consistently with this belief the course of nature is supposed to be more or less under his control, and he is held responsible for bad weather, failure of the crops, and similar calamities. To some extent it appears to be assumed that the king's power over nature, like that over his subjects and slaves, is exerted through definite acts of will; and therefore if drought, famine, pestilence, or storms arise, the people attribute the misfortune to the negligence or guilt of their king, and punish him accordingly with stripes and bonds, or, if he remains obdurate, with deposition and death. Sometimes, however, the course of nature, while regarded as dependent on the king, is supposed to be partly independent of his will. His person is considered, if we may express it so, as the dynamical centre of the universe, from which lines of force radiate to all quarters of the heaven; so that any motion of his—the turning of his head, the lifting of

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part II. *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, pp. 1-2.

his hand—instantaneously affects and may seriously disturb some part of nature. He is the point of support on which hangs the balance of the world, and the slightest irregularity on his part may overthrow the delicate equipoise. The greatest care must, therefore, be taken both by and of him; and his whole life, down to its minutest details, must be so regulated that no act of his, voluntary or involuntary, may disarrange or upset the established order of nature.

XCVI

THE ANALOGY OF MAGIC TO SCIENCE[1]

Wherever sympathetic magic occurs in its pure unadulterated form, it assumes that in nature one event follows another necessarily and invariably without the intervention of any spiritual or personal agency. Thus its fundamental conception is identical with that of modern science; underlying the whole system is a faith, implicit but real and firm, in the order and uniformity of nature. The magician does not doubt that the same causes will always produce the same effects, that the performance of the proper ceremony, accompanied by the appropriate spell, will inevitably be attended by the desired result, unless, indeed, his incantations should chance to be thwarted and foiled by the more potent charms of another sorcerer. He supplicates no higher power: he sues the favour of no fickle and wayward being: he abases himself before no awful deity. Yet his power, great as he believes it to be, is by no means arbitrary and unlimited. He can wield it only so long as he strictly conforms to the rules of his

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part I. *The Magic Art*, vol. i. pp. 220-222.

art, or to what may be called the laws of nature as conceived by him. To neglect these rules, to break these laws in the smallest particular is to incur failure, and may even expose the unskilful practitioner himself to the utmost peril. If he claims a sovereignty over nature, it is a constitutional sovereignty rigorously limited in its scope and exercised in exact conformity with ancient usage. Thus the analogy between the magical and the scientific conceptions of the world is close. In both of them the succession of events is perfectly regular and certain, being determined by immutable laws, the operation of which can be foreseen and calculated precisely ; the elements of caprice, of chance, and of accident are banished from the course of nature. Both of them open up a seemingly boundless vista of possibilities to him who knows the causes of things and can touch the secret springs that set in motion the vast and intricate mechanism of the world. Hence the strong attraction which magic and science alike have exercised on the human mind ; hence the powerful stimulus that both have given to the pursuit of knowledge. They lure the weary inquirer, the footsore seeker, on through the wilderness of disappointment in the present by their endless promises of the future : they take him up to the top of an exceeding high mountain and show him, beyond the dark clouds and rolling mists at his feet, a vision of the celestial city, far off, it may be, but radiant with unearthly splendour, bathed in the light of dreams.

The fatal flaw of magic lies not in its general assumption of a sequence of events determined by law, but in its total misconception of the nature of the particular laws which govern that sequence. If we analyse the various cases of sympathetic magic, we

shall find, as I have already indicated, that they are all mistaken applications of one or other of two great fundamental laws of thought, namely, the association of ideas by similarity and the association of ideas by contiguity in space or time. A mistaken association of similar ideas produces homoeopathic or imitative magic : a mistaken association of contiguous ideas produces contagious magic. The principles of association are excellent in themselves, and indeed absolutely essential to the working of the human mind. Legitimately applied they yield science ; illegitimately applied they yield magic, the bastard sister of science. It is therefore a truism, almost a tautology, to say that all magic is necessarily false and barren ; for were it ever to become true and fruitful, it would no longer be magic but science. From the earliest times man has been engaged in a search for general rules whereby to turn the order of natural phenomena to his own advantage, and in the long search he has scraped together a great hoard of such maxims, some of them golden and some of them mere dross. The true or golden rules constitute the body of applied science which we call the arts ; the false are magic.

XCVII

THE FALLACY OF MAGIC [1]

The reader may well be tempted to ask, How was it that intelligent men did not sooner detect the fallacy of magic? How could they continue to cherish expectations that were invariably doomed to disappointment? With what heart persist in playing

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part I. *The Magic Art*, vol. i. pp. 242-243.

venerable antics that led to nothing, and mumbling solemn balderdash that remained without effect? Why cling to beliefs which were so flatly contradicted by experience? How dare to repeat experiments that had failed so often? The answer seems to be that the fallacy was far from easy to detect, the failure by no means obvious, since in many, perhaps in most cases, the desired event did actually follow, at a longer or shorter interval, the performance of the rite which was designed to bring it about; and a mind of more than common acuteness was needed to perceive that, even in these cases, the rite was not necessarily the cause of the event. A ceremony intended to make the wind blow or the rain fall, or to work the death of an enemy, will always be followed, sooner or later, by the occurrence it is meant to bring to pass; and primitive man may be excused for regarding the occurrence as a direct result of the ceremony, and the best possible proof of its efficacy. Similarly, rites observed in the morning to help the sun to rise, and in spring to wake the dreaming earth from her winter sleep, will invariably appear to be crowned with success, at least within the temperate zones; for in these regions the sun lights his golden lamp in the east every morning, and year by year the vernal earth decks herself afresh with a rich mantle of green. Hence the practical savage, with his conservative instincts, might well turn a deaf ear to the subtleties of the theoretical doubter, the philosophic radical, who presumed to hint that sunrise and spring might not, after all, be direct consequences of the punctual performance of certain daily or yearly ceremonies, and that the sun might perhaps continue to rise and trees to blossom though the ceremonies were occasionally intermitted, or even

discontinued altogether. These sceptical doubts would naturally be repelled by the other with scorn and indignation as airy reveries subversive of the faith and manifestly contradicted by experience. "Can anything be plainer", he might say, "than that I light my twopenny candle on earth and that the sun then kindles his great fire in heaven? I should be glad to know whether, when I have put on my green robe in spring, the trees do not afterwards do the same? These are facts patent to everybody, and on them I take my stand. I am a plain practical man, not one of your theorists and splitters of hairs and choppers of logic. Theories, and speculation, and all that, may be very well in their way, and I have not the least objection to your indulging in them, provided, of course, you do not put them in practice. But give me leave to stick to facts; then I know where I am." The fallacy of this reasoning is obvious to us, because it happens to deal with facts about which we have long made up our minds. But let an argument of precisely the same calibre be applied to matters which are still under debate, and it may be questioned whether a British audience would not applaud it as sound, and esteem the speaker who used it a safe man —not brilliant or showy, perhaps, but thoroughly sensible and hard-headed. If such reasonings could pass muster among ourselves, need we wonder that they long escaped detection by the savage?

XCVIII

MAGIC OLDER THAN RELIGION [1]

Though magic is thus found to fuse and amalgamate with religion in many ages and in many lands, there are some grounds for thinking that this fusion is not primitive, and that there was a time when man trusted to magic alone for the satisfaction of such wants as transcended his immediate animal cravings. In the first place, a consideration of the fundamental notions of magic and religion may incline us to surmise that magic is older than religion in the history of humanity. We have seen that, on the one hand, magic is nothing but a mistaken application of the very simplest and most elementary processes of the mind, namely, the association of ideas by virtue of resemblance or contiguity; and that, on the other hand, religion assumes the operation of conscious or personal agents, superior to man, behind the visible screen of nature. Obviously the conception of personal agents is more complex than a simple recognition of the similarity or contiguity of ideas; and a theory which assumes that the course of nature is determined by conscious agents is more abstruse and recondite, and requires for its apprehension a far higher degree of intelligence and reflection, than the view that things succeed each other simply by reason of their contiguity or resemblance. The very beasts associate the ideas of things that are like each other or that have been found together in their experience; and they could hardly survive for a day if they ceased to

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part I. *The Magic Art*, vol. i. pp. 233-234.

do so. But who attributes to the animals a belief that the phenomena of nature are worked by a multitude of invisible animals or by one enormous and prodigiously strong animal behind the scenes? It is probably no injustice to the brutes to assume that the honour of devising a theory of this latter sort must be reserved for human reason. Thus, if magic be deduced immediately from elementary processes of reasoning, and be, in fact, an error into which the mind falls almost spontaneously, while religion rests on conceptions which the merely animal intelligence can hardly be supposed to have yet attained to, it becomes probable that magic arose before religion in the evolution of our race, and that man essayed to bend nature to his wishes by the sheer force of spells and enchantments before he strove to coax and mollify a coy, capricious, or irascible deity by the soft insinuation of prayer and sacrifice.

XCIX

THE PASSAGE FROM MAGIC TO RELIGION[1]

If an Age of Religion has thus everywhere, as I venture to surmise, been preceded by an Age of Magic, it is natural that we should inquire what causes have led mankind, or rather a portion of them, to abandon magic as a principle of faith and practice and to betake themselves to religion instead. When we reflect upon the multitude, the variety, and the complexity of the facts to be explained, and the scantiness of our information regarding them, we shall be ready to acknowledge that a full and satisfactory solution of so profound a

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part I. *The Magic Art*, vol. i. pp. 237-240.

problem is hardly to be hoped for, and that the most we can do in the present state of our knowledge is to hazard a more or less plausible conjecture. With all due diffidence, then, I would suggest that a tardy recognition of the inherent falsehood and barrenness of magic set the more thoughtful part of mankind to cast about for a truer theory of nature and a more fruitful method of turning her resources to account. The shrewder intelligences must in time have come to perceive that magical ceremonies and incantations did not really effect the results which they were designed to produce, and which the majority of their simpler fellows still believed that they did actually produce. This great discovery of the inefficacy of magic must have wrought a radical though probably slow revolution in the minds of those who had the sagacity to make it. The discovery amounted to this, that men for the first time recognized their inability to manipulate at pleasure certain natural forces which hitherto they had believed to be completely within their control. It was a confession of human ignorance and weakness. Man saw that he had taken for causes what were no causes, and that all his efforts to work by means of these imaginary causes had been vain. His painful toil had been wasted, his curious ingenuity had been squandered to no purpose. He had been pulling at strings to which nothing was attached ; he had been marching, as he thought, straight to the goal, while in reality he had only been treading in a narrow circle. Not that the effects which he had striven so hard to produce did not continue to manifest themselves. They were still produced, but not by him. The rain still fell on the thirsty ground : the sun still pursued his daily, and the moon her nightly journey across the

sky : the silent procession of the seasons still moved in light and shadow, in cloud and sunshine across the earth : men were still born to labour and sorrow, and still, after a brief sojourn here, were gathered to their fathers in the long home hereafter. All things indeed went on as before, yet all seemed different to him from whose eyes the old scales had fallen. For he could no longer cherish the pleasing illusion that it was he who guided the earth and the heaven in their courses, and that they would cease to perform their great revolutions were he to take his feeble hand from the wheel. In the death of his enemies and his friends he no longer saw a proof of the resistless potency of his own or of hostile enchantments ; he now knew that friends and foes alike had succumbed to a force stronger than any that he could wield, and in obedience to a destiny which he was powerless to control.

Thus cut adrift from his ancient moorings and left to toss on a troubled sea of doubt and uncertainty, his old happy confidence in himself and in his powers rudely shaken, our primitive philosopher must have been sadly perplexed and agitated till he came to rest, as in a quiet haven after a tempestuous voyage, in a new system of faith and practice, which seemed to offer a solution of his harassing doubts and a substitute, however precarious, for that sovereignty over nature which he had reluctantly abdicated. If the great world went on its way without the help of him or his fellows, it must surely be because there were other beings, like himself, but far stronger, who, unseen themselves, directed its course and brought about all the varied series of events which he had hitherto believed to be dependent on his own magic. It was they, as he now believed, and not he himself, who

made the stormy wind to blow, the lightning to flash, and the thunder to roll; who had laid the foundations of the solid earth and set bounds to the restless sea that it might not pass; who caused all the glorious lights of heaven to shine; who gave the fowls of the air their meat and the wild beasts of the desert their prey; who bade the fruitful land to bring forth in abundance, the high hills to be clothed with forests, the bubbling springs to rise under the rocks in the valleys, and green pastures to grow by still waters; who breathed into man's nostrils and made him live, or turned him to destruction by famine and pestilence and war. To these mighty beings, whose handiwork he traced in all the gorgeous and varied pageantry of nature, man now addressed himself, humbly confessing his dependence on their invisible power, and beseeching them of their mercy to furnish him with all good things, to defend him from the perils and dangers by which our mortal life is compassed about on every hand, and finally to bring his immortal spirit, freed from the burden of the body, to some happier world, beyond the reach of pain and sorrow, where he might rest with them and with the spirits of good men in joy and felicity for ever.

In this, or some such way as this, the deeper minds may be conceived to have made the great transition from magic to religion. But even in them the change can hardly ever have been sudden; probably it proceeded very slowly, and required long ages for its more or less perfect accomplishment. For the recognition of man's powerlessness to influence the course of nature on a grand scale must have been gradual; he cannot have been shorn of the whole of his fancied dominion at a blow. Step by step he

must have been driven back from his proud position; foot by foot he must have yielded, with a sigh, the ground which he had once viewed as his own. Now it would be the wind, now the rain, now the sunshine, now the thunder, that he confessed himself unable to wield at will; and as province after province of nature thus fell from his grasp, till what had once seemed a kingdom threatened to shrink into a prison, man must have been more and more profoundly impressed with a sense of his own helplessness and the might of the invisible beings by whom he believed himself to be surrounded. Thus religion, beginning as a slight and partial acknowledgement of powers superior to man, tends with the growth of knowledge to deepen into a confession of man's entire and absolute dependence on the divine; his old free bearing is exchanged for an attitude of lowliest prostration before the mysterious powers of the unseen, and his highest virtue is to submit his will to theirs: *In la sua volontade è nostra pace.* But this deepening sense of religion, this more perfect submission to the divine will in all things, affects only those higher intelligences who have breadth of view enough to comprehend the vastness of the universe and the littleness of man. Small minds cannot grasp great ideas; to their narrow comprehension, their purblind vision, nothing seems really great and important but themselves. Such minds hardly rise into religion at all. They are, indeed, drilled by their betters into an outward conformity with its precepts and a verbal profession of its tenets; but at heart they cling to their old magical superstitions, which may be discountenanced and forbidden, but cannot be eradicated by religion, so long as they have their roots deep down in the

mental framework and constitution of the great majority of mankind.

C

EFFECT OF THE VARIABILITY OF CLIMATE ON THE BELIEF IN MAGIC[1]

A little reflection will probably convince us that the more variable the course of nature throughout the year, the more persistent probably will be man's efforts to regulate it for his benefit, and the firmer will be his faith in his power to do so. In other words, the more marked the changes of the seasons, the greater will tend to be the prevalence of magic and the belief in its efficacy, though naturally that tendency may be counteracted by other causes. On the other hand, where nature is bounteous and her course is uniform or varies but little from year's end to year's end, man will neither need nor desire to alter it by magic or otherwise to suit his convenience. For he makes magic, just as he prays and sacrifices, in order to obtain what he has not got; if he already possesses all he wants, why should he exert himself? It is in times of need and distress rather than of abundance and prosperity that man betakes himself to the practice both of magic and of religion. Hence in some tropical regions of eternal summer, where moisture, warmth, and sunshine never fail, where the trees are always green and fruits always hang from the boughs, where the waters perpetually swarm with fish and the forests teem with an exuberance of animal life, ceremonies for the making of rain and sunshine and for the multiplication of edible beasts and plants are for

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i. pp. 169-172.

the most part absent or inconspicuous. For example, we hear little or nothing of them, so far as I remember, among the Indians of the luxuriant forests of Brazil. Far otherwise is it with countries where a brief summer alternates with a chilly spring, a fickle autumn, and a long and rigorous winter. There of necessity man is put to all his shifts to snatch from a churlish nature boons that are at once evanescent and precarious. There, accordingly, that branch of magic which aims at procuring the necessaries of life may be expected to flourish most luxuriantly.

To put it generally, the practice of magic for the control of nature will be found, on the whole, to increase with the variability and to decrease with the uniformity of the course of nature throughout the year. Hence the increase will tend to become more and more conspicuous as we recede from the equator, where the annual changes of natural conditions are much less marked than elsewhere. This general rule is no doubt subject to many exceptions which depend on local varieties of climate. Where the contrast between a wet and a dry season is sharply marked, as in the track of the monsoons, magic may well be invoked to secure the advantages or remedy the inconveniences of heavy rain or drought. But, on the whole, this department of magic, if not checked by civilization or other causes, would naturally attain its highest vogue in the temperate and polar zones rather than in the equatorial regions; while, on the other hand, the branch of magical art which deals directly with mankind, aiming, for example, at the cure or infliction of disease, tends for obvious reasons to be diffused equally over the globe without distinction of latitude or climate. And the same

causes which impel men to practise magic for the control of nature confirm their belief in its efficacy; for the very changes which the magician seeks to bring about by his spells are silently wrought by the operation of natural law, and thus the apparent success of his efforts greatly strengthens the wizard's confidence in his imaginary powers.

Nowhere, apparently, in the world are the alternations of the seasons so sudden and the contrasts between them so violent, nowhere, accordingly, is the seeming success of magic more conspicuous than in the deserts of Central Australia. The wonderful change which passes over the face of nature after the first rains of the season has been compared even by European observers to the effect of magic; what marvel, then, that the savage should mistake it for such in very truth? It is difficult, we are told, to conceive the contrast between the steppes of Australia in the dry and in the rainy season. In the dry season the landscape presents a scene of desolation. The sun shines down hotly on stony plains or yellow sandy ground, on which grow wiry shrubs and small tussocks of grass, not set closely together, as in moister lands, but straggling separately, so that in any patch the number of plants can be counted. The sharp, thin shadows of the wiry scrub fall on the yellow ground, which betrays no sign of animal life save for the little ant-hills, thousands of whose inmates are seen rushing about in apparently hopeless confusion, or piling leaves and seeds in regular order around the entrance to their burrows. A desert oak, as it is called, or an acacia tree, may here and there afford a scanty shade, but for weeks together there are no clouds to hide the brightness of the sun by day or of the stars

by night. All this is changed when heavy rains have fallen and torrents rush down the lately dry beds of the rivers, sweeping along uprooted trees and great masses of tangled wrack on their impetuous current, and flooding far and wide the flat lands on either bank. Then what has been for months an arid wilderness is suddenly changed into a vast sheet of water. Soon, however, the rain ceases to fall and the flood subsides rapidly. For a few days the streams run, then dry up, and only the deeper holes here and there retain the water. The sun once more shines down hotly, and in the damp ground seeds which have lain dormant for months sprout and, as if by magic, the desert becomes covered with luxuriant herbage, and gay with the blossoms of endless flowering plants. Birds, frogs, lizards, and insects of all sorts may be seen and heard where lately everything was parched and silent. Plants and animals alike make the most of the brief time in which they can grow and multiply; the struggle for existence is all the keener because it is so short. If a young plant can strike its roots deep enough to reach the cool soil below the heated surface, it may live; if not, it must perish. If a young animal grows fast enough to be able to burrow while the banks of the water-hole in which it lives are still damp, it, too, stands a chance of surviving. Now it is just when there is promise of a good season that the natives of these regions are wont especially to perform their magical ceremonies for the multiplication of the plants and animals which they use as food. Can we wonder that the accomplishment of their wishes, which so soon follows, should appear to them a conclusive proof of the efficacy of their incantations? Nature herself seems to conspire to foster the delusion.

CI

THE RELIGION AND MAGIC OF THE SEASONS [1]

The spectacle of the great changes which annually pass over the face of the earth has powerfully impressed the minds of men in all ages, and stirred them to meditate on the causes of transformations so vast and wonderful. Their curiosity has not been purely disinterested; for even the savage cannot fail to perceive how intimately his own life is bound up with the life of nature, and how the same processes which freeze the stream and strip the earth of vegetation menace him with extinction. At a certain stage of development men seem to have imagined that the means of averting the threatened calamity were in their own hands, and that they could hasten or retard the flight of the seasons by magic art. Accordingly they performed ceremonies and recited spells to make the rain to fall, the sun to shine, animals to multiply, and the fruits of the earth to grow. In course of time the slow advance of knowledge, which has dispelled so many cherished illusions, convinced at least the more thoughtful portion of mankind that the alternations of summer and winter, of spring and autumn, were not merely the result of their own magical rites, but that some deeper cause, some mightier power, was at work behind the shifting scenes of nature. They now pictured to themselves the growth and decay of vegetation, the birth and death of living creatures, as effects of the waxing or waning strength of divine beings, of gods and goddesses, who were

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part IV. *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, vol. i. pp. 3-5.

born and died, who married and begot children, on the pattern of human life.

Thus the old magical theory of the seasons was displaced, or rather supplemented, by a religious theory. For although men now attributed the annual cycle of change primarily to corresponding changes in their deities, they still thought that by performing certain magical rites they could aid the god, who was the principle of life, in his struggle with the opposing principle of death. They imagined that they could recruit his failing energies and even raise him from the dead. The ceremonies which they observed for this purpose were in substance a dramatic representation of the natural processes which they wished to facilitate; for it is a familiar tenet of magic that you can produce any desired effect by merely imitating it. And as they now explained the fluctuations of growth and decay, of reproduction and dissolution, by the marriage, the death, and the rebirth or revival of the gods, their religious or rather magical dramas turned in great measure on these themes. They set forth the fruitful union of the powers of fertility, the sad death of one at least of the divine partners, and his joyful resurrection. Thus a religious theory was blended with a magical practice. The combination is familiar in history. Indeed, few religions have ever succeeded in wholly extricating themselves from the old trammels of magic. The inconsistency of acting on two opposite principles, however it may vex the soul of the philosopher, rarely troubles the common man; indeed he is seldom even aware of it. His affair is to act, not to analyse the motives of his action. If mankind had always been logical and wise, history would not be a long chronicle of folly and crime.

Of the changes which the seasons bring with them, the most striking within the temperate zone are those which affect vegetation. The influence of the seasons on animals, though great, is not nearly so manifest. Hence it is natural that in the magical dramas designed to dispel winter and bring back spring the stress should be laid on vegetation, and that trees and plants should figure in them more prominently than beasts and birds. Yet the two sides of life, the vegetable and the animal, were not dissociated in the minds of those who observed the ceremonies. Indeed they commonly believed that the tie between the animal and the vegetable world was even closer than it really is; hence they often combined the dramatic representation of reviving plants with a real or a dramatic union of the sexes for the purpose of furthering at the same time and by the same act the multiplication of fruits, of animals, and of men. To them the principle of life and fertility, whether animal or vegetable, was one and indivisible. To live and to cause to live, to eat food and to beget children, these were the primary wants of men in the past, and they will be the primary wants of men in the future so long as the world lasts. Other things may be added to enrich and beautify human life, but unless these wants are first satisfied, humanity itself must cease to exist. These two things, therefore, food and children, were what men chiefly sought to procure by the performance of magical rites for the regulation of the seasons.

CII

THE CHANGES OF THE SEASONS IN GREEK MYTHOLOGY [1]

The Greek had no need to journey into far countries to learn the vicissitudes of the seasons, to mark the fleeting beauty of the damask rose, the transient glory of the golden corn, the passing splendour of the purple grapes. Year by year in his own beautiful land he beheld, with natural regret, the bright pomp of summer fading into the gloom and stagnation of winter, and year by year he hailed with natural delight the outburst of fresh life in spring. Accustomed to personify the forces of nature, to tinge her cold abstractions with the warm hues of imagination, to clothe her naked realities with the gorgeous drapery of a mythic fancy, he fashioned for himself a train of gods and goddesses, of spirits and elves, out of the shifting panorama of the seasons, and followed the annual fluctuations of their fortunes with alternate emotions of cheerfulness and dejection, of gladness and sorrow, which found their natural expression in alternate rites of rejoicing and lamentation, of revelry and mourning. A consideration of some of the Greek divinities who thus died and rose again from the dead may furnish us with a series of companion pictures to set side by side with the sad figures of Adonis, Attis, and Osiris.

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part V. *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*, vol. i. p. 2.

CIII

THE INFLUENCE OF NATURE ON RELIGION [1]

I am more than ever persuaded that religion, like all other institutions, has been profoundly influenced by physical environment, and cannot be understood without some appreciation of those aspects of external nature which stamp themselves indelibly on the thoughts, the habits, the whole life of a people. It is a matter of great regret to me that I have never visited the East, and so cannot describe from personal knowledge the native lands of Adonis, Attis, and Osiris. But I have sought to remedy the defect by comparing the descriptions of eye-witnesses, and painting from them what may be called composite pictures of some of the scenes on which I have been led to touch in the course of my studies. I shall not have wholly failed if I have caught from my authorities and conveyed to my readers some notion, however dim, of the scenery, the atmosphere, the gorgeous colouring of the East.

CIV

THE CREATION OF THE WORLD [2]

The early philosophers who meditated on the origin of things may have pictured to themselves the creation or evolution of the world on the analogy of the great changes which outside the tropics pass over

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part IV. *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, vol. i., Preface to the first edition, pp. v-vi.

[2] *The Golden Bough*, Part III. *The Dying God*, pp. 108-109.

the face of nature every year. In these changes it is not hard to discern or to imagine a conflict between two hostile forces or principles, the principle of construction or of life and the principle of destruction or of death, victory inclining now to the one and now to the other, according as winter yields to spring or summer fades into autumn. It would be natural enough to suppose that the same mighty rivals which still wage war on each other had done so from the beginning, and that the formation of the universe as it now exists had resulted from the shock of their battle. On this theory the creation of the world is repeated every spring, and its dissolution is threatened every autumn: the one is proclaimed by summer's gay heralds, the opening flowers; the other is whispered by winter's sad harbingers, the yellow leaves. Here as elsewhere the old creed is echoed by the poet's fancy:

> "*Non alios prima crescentis origine mundi*
> *Inluxisse dies aliumve habuisse tenorem*
> *Crediderim: ver illud erat, ver magnus agebat*
> *Orbis, et hibernis parcebant flatibus Euri,*
> *Cum primae lucem pecudes hausere, virumque*
> *Ferrea progenies duris caput extulit arvis,*
> *Inmissaeque ferae silvis et sidera caelo.*"

Thus the ceremonies which in many lands have been performed to hasten the departure of winter or stay the flight of summer are in a sense attempts to create the world afresh, to "re-mould it nearer to the Heart's desire". But if we would set ourselves at the point of view of the old sages who devised means so feeble to accomplish a purpose so immeasurably vast, we must divest ourselves of our modern conceptions of the immensity of the universe and of the pettiness and insignificance of man's place in it. We

must imagine the infinitude of space shrunk to a few miles, the infinitude of time contracted to a few generations. To the savage the mountains that bound the visible horizon, or the sea that stretches away to meet it, is the world's end. Beyond these narrow limits his feet have never strayed, and even his imagination fails to conceive what lies across the waste of waters or the far blue hills. Of the future he hardly thinks, and of the past he knows only what has been handed down to him by word of mouth from his savage forefathers. To suppose that a world thus circumscribed in space and time was created by the efforts or the fiat of a being like himself imposes no great strain on his credulity ; and he may without much difficulty imagine that he himself can annually repeat the work of creation by his charms and incantations. And once a horde of savages had instituted magical ceremonies for the renewal or preservation of all things, the force of custom and tradition would tend to maintain them in practice long after the old narrow ideas of the universe had been superseded by more adequate conceptions, and the tribe had expanded into a nation.

CV

THE MAGIC SPRING[1]

The general explanation which we have been led to adopt of these and many similar ceremonies is that they are, or were in their origin, magical rites intended to ensure the revival of nature in spring. The means by which they were supposed to effect

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part III. *The Dying God*, pp. 266-271.

this end were imitation and sympathy. Led astray by his ignorance of the true causes of things, primitive man believed that in order to produce the great phenomena of nature on which his life depended he had only to imitate them, and that immediately by a secret sympathy or mystic influence the little drama which he acted in forest glade or mountain dell, on desert plain or wind-swept shore, would be taken up and repeated by mightier actors on a vaster stage. He fancied that by masquerading in leaves and flowers he helped the bare earth to clothe herself with verdure, and that by playing the death and burial of winter he drove that gloomy season away, and made smooth the path for the footsteps of returning spring.

If we find it hard to throw ourselves even in fancy into a mental condition in which such things seem possible, we can more easily picture to ourselves the anxiety which the savage, when he first began to lift his thoughts above the satisfaction of his merely animal wants and to meditate on the causes of things, may have felt as to the continued operation of what we now call the laws of nature. To us, familiar as we are with the conception of the uniformity and regularity with which the great cosmic phenomena succeed each other, there seems little ground for apprehension that the causes which produce these effects will cease to operate, at least within the near future. But this confidence in the stability of nature is bred only by the experience which comes of wide observation and long tradition ; and the savage, with his narrow sphere of observation and his short-lived tradition, lacks the very elements of that experience which alone could set his mind at rest in face of the ever-changing and

often menacing aspects of nature. No wonder, therefore, that he is thrown into a panic by an eclipse, and thinks that the sun or the moon would surely perish, if he did not raise a clamour and shoot his puny shafts into the air to defend the luminaries from the monster who threatens to devour them. No wonder he is terrified when in the darkness of night a streak of sky is suddenly illumined by the flash of a meteor, or the whole expanse of the celestial arch glows with the fitful light of the Northern Streamers.

Even phenomena which recur at fixed and uniform intervals may be viewed by him with apprehension before he has come to recognize the orderliness of their recurrence. The speed or slowness of his recognition of such periodic or cyclic changes in nature will depend largely on the length of the particular cycle. The cycle, for example, of day and night is everywhere, except in the polar regions, so short and hence so frequent that men probably soon ceased to discompose themselves seriously as to the chance of its failing to recur, though the ancient Egyptians daily wrought enchantments to bring back to the east in the morning the fiery orb which had sunk at evening in the crimson west. But it was far otherwise with the annual cycle of the seasons. To any man a year is a considerable period, seeing that the number of our years is but few at the best. To the primitive savage, with his short memory and imperfect means of marking the flight of time, a year may well have been so long that he failed to recognize it as a cycle at all, and watched the changing aspects of earth and heaven with a perpetual wonder, alternately delighted and alarmed, elated and cast down, according as the vicissitudes of light and heat, of rain

and drought, of plant and animal life, ministered to his comfort or threatened his existence. In autumn when the withered leaves were whirled about the forest by the nipping blast, and he looked up at the bare boughs, could he feel sure that they would ever be green again? As day by day the sun sank lower and lower in the sky, could he be certain that the luminary would ever retrace his heavenly road? Even the waning moon, whose pale sickle rose thinner and thinner every night over the rim of the eastern horizon, may have excited in his mind a fear lest, when it had wholly vanished, there should be moons no more.

These and a thousand such misgivings may have thronged the fancy and troubled the peace of the man who first began to reflect on the mysteries of the world he lived in, and to take thought for a more distant future than the morrow. It was natural, therefore, that with such thoughts and fears he should have done all that in him lay to bring back the faded blossom to the bough, to swing the low sun of winter up to his old place in the summer sky, and to restore its orbed fullness to the silver lamp of the waning moon. We may smile at his vain endeavours if we please, but it was only by making a long series of experiments, of which many were almost inevitably doomed to failure, that man learned from experience the futility of some of his attempted methods and the fruitfulness of others. After all, magical ceremonies are nothing but experiments which have failed, and which continue to be repeated merely because the operator is unaware of their failure. With the advance of knowledge these ceremonies either cease to be performed altogether or are kept up from the force of habit long after the intention with which they were instituted

has been forgotten. Thus fallen from their high estate, no longer regarded as solemn rites on the punctual performance of which the welfare and even the life of the community depend, they sink gradually to the level of simple pageants, mummeries and pastimes, till in the final stage of degeneration they are wholly abandoned by older people, and, from having once been the most serious occupation of the sage, become at last the idle sport of children. It is in this final stage of obsolescence and decay that most of the old magical rites of our European forefathers linger on at the present day, and even from this their last retreat they are fast being swept away by the rising tide of those multitudinous forces, moral, intellectual, and social, which are bearing mankind onward to a new and unknown goal. We may feel some natural regret at the disappearance of quaint customs and picturesque ceremonies, which have preserved to an age often deemed dull and prosaic something of the flavour and freshness of the olden time, some breath of the springtime of the world; yet our regret will be lessened when we remember that these pretty pageants, these now innocent diversions, had their origin in ignorance and superstition; that if they are a record of human endeavour, they are also a monument of fruitless ingenuity, of wasted labour, and of blighted hopes; and that for all their gay trappings—their flowers, their ribbons, and their music—they partake far more of tragedy than of farce.

The interpretation which, following in the footsteps of W. Mannhardt, I have attempted to give of these ceremonies has been not a little confirmed by the discovery that the natives of Central Australia regularly practise magical ceremonies for the purpose of awakening

the dormant energies of nature at the approach of what may be called the Australian spring. And as the faith of the Australian savage in the efficacy of his magic rites is confirmed by observing that their performance is invariably followed, sooner or later, by that increase of vegetable and animal life which it is their object to produce, so, we may suppose, it was with European savages in the olden time. The sight of the fresh green in brake and thicket, of vernal flowers blowing on mossy banks, of swallows arriving from the south, and of the sun mounting daily higher in the sky, would be welcomed by them as so many visible signs that their enchantments were indeed taking effect, and would inspire them with a cheerful confidence that all was well with a world which they could thus mould to suit their wishes. Only in autumn days, as summer slowly faded, would their confidence again be dashed by doubts and misgivings at symptoms of decay, which told how vain were all their efforts to stave off for ever the approach of winter and of death.

CVI

RANDOM SHOTS OF MAGIC[1]

Magical rites may be compared to shots discharged at random in the dark, some of which by accident hit the mark. If the gunner learns to distinguish between his hits and his misses, he will concentrate his hitherto scattered fire in the right direction and accomplish his purpose. If he fails to make the distinction, he will continue his random discharges with as little

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i. p. 219.

result as before. A scientific farmer is an artillery-man of the former sort; an Australian headman of the grass-seed totem is an artilleryman of the latter sort. It is the distinction between magic and science, between savagery and civilization.

CVII

MAGICAL RITES OF PASTORAL PEOPLE[1]

Many rites which have hitherto been interpreted as a worship of cattle may have been in origin, if not always, nothing but a series of precautions, based on the theory of sympathetic magic, for the protection of the herds from the dangers that would threaten them through an indiscriminate use of their milk by everybody, whether clean or unclean, whether friend or foe. The savage who believes that he himself can be magically injured by ill-wishers through the secretions of his body naturally applies the same theory to his cattle and takes the same sort of steps to safeguard them as to safeguard himself. If this view is right, the superstitious restrictions imposed by pastoral peoples on the use of milk are analogous to the superstitious precautions which the savage adopts with regard to the disposal of his shorn hair, clipped nails, and other severed parts of his person. In their essence they are not religious but magical. Yet in time such taboos might easily receive a religious interpretation and merge into a true worship of cattle. For while the logical distinction between magic and religion is sharp as a knife-edge, there is no such acute and rigid line of cleavage between them historically.

[1] *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, vol. iii. pp. 163-164.

With the vagueness characteristic of primitive thought the two are constantly fusing with each other, like two streams, one of blue and one of yellow water, which meet and blend into a river that is neither wholly yellow nor wholly blue. But the historical confusion of magic and religion no more dispenses the philosophic student of human thought from the need of resolving the compound into its constituent parts than the occurrence of most chemical elements in combination dispenses the analytical chemist from the need of separating and distinguishing them. The mind has its chemistry as well as the body. Its elements may be more subtle and mercurial, yet even here a fine instrument will seize and mark distinctions which might elude a coarser handling.

CVIII

THE RELIGIOUS OR MAGICAL ORIGIN OF THE DRAMA [1]

The dramatic performances of primitive peoples are often religious or perhaps still oftener magical ceremonies, and the songs or recitations which accompany them are spells or incantations, though the real character of both is apt to be overlooked by civilized man, accustomed as he is to see in the drama nothing more than an agreeable pastime or at best a vehicle of moral instruction. Yet if we could trace the drama of the civilized nations back to its origin, we might find that it had its roots in magical or religious ideas like those which still mould and direct the masked dances of many savages. Certainly the Athenians

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part VI. *The Scapegoat*, pp. 384-388.

in the heyday of their brilliant civilization retained a lively sense of the religious import of dramatic performances; for they associated them directly with the worship of the vine-god Dionysus and allowed them to be enacted only during his festivals. In India, also, the drama appears to have been developed out of religious dances or pantomimes, in which the actors recited the deeds and played the parts of national gods and heroes. Hence it is at least a legitimate hypothesis that at Babylon the criminal, who masqueraded as a king and perished in that character at the Bacchanalian festival of the Sacaea, was only one of a company of actors, who figured on that occasion in a sacred drama of which the substance has been preserved to us in the book of Esther.

When once we perceive that the gods and goddesses, the heroes and heroines of mythology have been represented officially, so to say, by a long succession of living men and women who bore the names and were supposed to exercise the functions of these fabulous creatures, we have attained a point of vantage from which it seems possible to propose terms of peace between two rival schools of mythologists who have been waging fierce war on each other for ages. On the one hand, it has been argued that mythical beings are nothing but personifications of natural objects and natural processes; on the other hand, it has been maintained that they are nothing but notable men and women who in their lifetime, for one reason or another, made a great impression on their fellows, but whose doings have been distorted and exaggerated by a false and credulous tradition. These two views, it is now easy to see, are not so mutually exclusive as their supporters have imagined. The personages about

whom all the marvels of mythology have been told may have been real human beings, as the Euhemerists allege; and yet they may have been at the same time personifications of natural objects or processes, as the adversaries of Euhemerism assert. The doctrine of incarnation supplies the missing link that was needed to unite the two seemingly inconsistent theories. If the powers of nature or of a certain department of nature be conceived as personified in a deity, and that deity can become incarnate in a man or woman, it is obvious that the incarnate deity is at the same time a real human being and a personification of nature. Thus, for example, Semiramis may have been the great Semitic goddess of love, Ishtar or Astarte, and yet she may be supposed to have been incarnate in a woman or even in a series of real women, whether queens or harlots, whose memory survives in ancient history. Saturn, again, may have been the god of sowing and planting, and yet may have been represented on earth by a succession or dynasty of sacred kings, whose gay but short lives may have contributed to build up the legend of the Golden Age. The longer the series of such human divinities, the greater, obviously, the chance of their myth or legend surviving; and when, moreover, a deity of a uniform type was represented, whether under the same name or not, over a great extent of country by many local dynasties of divine men or women, it is clear that the stories about him would tend still further to persist and be stereotyped.

The conclusion which we have reached in regard to the legend of Semiramis and her lovers probably holds good of all the similar tales that were current in antiquity throughout the East; in particular, it may

be assumed to apply to the myths of Aphrodite and Adonis in Syria, of Cybele and Attis in Phrygia, and of Isis and Osiris in Egypt. If we could trace these stories back to their origin, we might find that in every case a human couple acted year by year the parts of the loving goddess and the dying god. We know that down to Roman times Attis was personated by priests who bore his name ; and if within the period of which we have knowledge the dead Attis and the dead Adonis were represented only by effigies, we may surmise that it had not always been so, and that in both cases the dead god was once represented by a dead man. Further, the license accorded to the man who played the dying god at the Sacaea speaks strongly in favour of the hypothesis that before the incarnate deity was put to a public death he was in all cases allowed, or rather required, to enjoy the embraces of a woman who played the goddess of love. The reason for such an enforced union of the human god and goddess is not hard to divine. If primitive man believes that the growth of the crops can be stimulated by the intercourse of common men and women, what showers of blessings will he not anticipate from the commerce of a pair whom his fancy invests with all the dignity and powers of deities of fertility ?

Thus the theory of Movers, that at the Sacaea the human victim, the so-called Zoganes, represented a god and paired with a woman who personated a goddess, turns out to rest on deeper and wider foundations than that able scholar was aware of. He thought that the divine couple who figured by deputy at the ceremony were Semiramis and Sandan or Sardanapalus. It now appears that he was

substantially right as to the goddess; but we have still to inquire into the god. There seems to be no doubt that the name Sardanapalus is only the Greek way of representing Ashurbanipal, the name of the greatest and nearly the last king of Assyria. But the records of the real monarch which have come to light within recent years give little support to the fables that attached to his name in classical tradition. For they prove that, far from being the effeminate weakling he seemed to the Greeks of a later age, he was a warlike and enlightened monarch, who carried the arms of Assyria to distant lands and fostered at home the growth of science and letters. Still, though the historical reality of King Ashurbanipal is as well attested as that of Alexander or Charlemagne, it would be no wonder if myths gathered, like clouds, round the great figure that loomed large in the stormy sunset of Assyrian glory. Now the two features that stand out most prominently in the legends of Sardanapalus are his extravagant debauchery and his violent death in the flames of a great pyre, on which he burned himself and his concubines to save them from falling into the hands of his victorious enemies. It is said that the womanish king, with painted face and arrayed in female attire, passed his days in the seclusion of the harem, spinning purple wool among his concubines and wallowing in sensual delights; and that in the epitaph which he caused to be carved on his tomb he recorded that all the days of his life he ate and drank and toyed, remembering that life is short and full of trouble, that fortune is uncertain, and that others would soon enjoy the good things which he must leave behind. These traits bear little resemblance to the portrait of Ashurbanipal either in

life or in death; for after a brilliant career of conquest the Assyrian king died in old age, at the height of human ambition, with peace at home and triumph abroad, the admiration of his subjects and the terror of his foes. But if the traditional characteristics of Sardanapalus harmonize but ill with what we know of the real monarch of that name, they fit well enough with all that we know or can conjecture of the mock kings, the human victims, who led a short life and a merry during the revelry of the Sacaea, the Asiatic equivalent of the Saturnalia. We can hardly doubt that for the most part such men, with death staring them in the face at the end of a few days, sought to drown care and deaden fear by plunging madly into all the fleeting joys that still offered themselves under the sun. When their brief pleasures and sharp sufferings were over, and their bones or ashes mingled with the dust, what more natural that on their tomb—those mounds in which the people saw, not untruly, the graves of the lovers of Semiramis—there should be carved some such lines as those which tradition placed in the mouth of the great Assyrian king, to remind the heedless passer-by of the shortness and vanity of life?

CIX

SACRED DRAMAS AS MAGICAL RITES[1]

At the great sanctuary of the goddess in Zela it appears that her myth was regularly translated into action; the story of her love and the death of her divine lover was performed year by year as a sort of mystery-play by men and women who lived for a

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part VI. *The Scapegoat*, pp. 373-375.

season and sometimes died in the character of the visionary beings whom they personated. The intention of these sacred dramas, we may be sure, was neither to amuse nor to instruct an idle audience, and as little were they designed to gratify the actors, to whose baser passions they gave the reins for a time. They were solemn rites which mimicked the doings of divine beings, because man fancied that by such mimicry he was able to arrogate to himself the divine functions and to exercise them for the good of his fellows. The operations of nature, to his thinking, were carried on by mythical personages very like himself; and if he could only assimilate himself to them completely he would be able to wield all their powers. This is probably the original motive of most religious dramas or mysteries among rude peoples. The dramas are played, the mysteries are performed, not to teach the spectators the doctrines of their creed, still less to entertain them, but for the purpose of bringing about those natural effects which they represent in mythical disguise; in a word, they are magical ceremonies and their mode of operation is mimicry or sympathy. We shall probably not err in assuming that many myths, which we now know only as myths, had once their counterpart in magic; in other words, that they used to be acted as a means of producing in fact the events which they describe in figurative language. Ceremonies often die out while myths survive, and thus we are left to infer the dead ceremony from the living myth. If myths are, in a sense, the reflections or shadows of men cast upon the clouds, we may say that these reflections continue to be visible in the sky and to inform us of the doings of the men who cast them, long after the men themselves

are not only beyond our range of vision but sunk beneath the horizon.

The principle of mimicry is implanted so deep in human nature and has exerted so far-reaching an influence on the development of religion as well as of the arts that it may be well, even at the cost of a short digression, to illustrate by example some of the modes in which primitive man has attempted to apply it to the satisfaction of his wants by means of religious or magical dramas. For it seems probable that the masked dances and ceremonies, which have played a great part in the social life of savages in many quarters of the world, were primarily designed to subserve practical purposes rather than simply to stir the emotions of the spectators and to while away the languor and tedium of idle hours. The actors sought to draw down blessings on the community by mimicking certain powerful superhuman beings and in their assumed character working those beneficent miracles which in the capacity of mere men they would have confessed themselves powerless to effect. In fact, the aim of these elementary dramas, which contain in germ the tragedy and comedy of civilized nations, was the acquisition of superhuman power for the public good.

CX

ANCIENT SATURNALIAS[1]

We have found evidence that festivals of the type of the Saturnalia, characterized by an inversion of social ranks and the sacrifice of a man in the character of a god, were at one time held all over the ancient

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part VI. *The Scapegoat*, pp. 407-409.

world from Italy to Babylon. Such festivals seem to date from an early age in the history of agriculture, when people lived in small communities, each presided over by a sacred or divine king, whose primary duty was to secure the orderly succession of the seasons, the fertility of the earth, and the fecundity both of cattle and of women. Associated with him was his wife or other female consort, with whom he performed some of the necessary ceremonies, and who therefore shared his divine character. Originally his term of office appears to have been limited to a year, on the conclusion of which he was put to death ; but in time he contrived by force or craft to extend his reign and sometimes to procure a substitute, who after a short and more or less nominal tenure of the crown was slain in his stead. At first the substitute for the divine father was probably the divine son, but afterwards this rule was no longer insisted on, and still later the growth of a humane feeling demanded that the victim should always be a condemned criminal. In this advanced stage of degeneration it is no wonder if the light of divinity suffered eclipse, and many should fail to detect the god in the malefactor. Yet the downward career of fallen deity does not stop here ; even a criminal comes to be thought too good to personate a god on the gallows or in the fire ; and then there is nothing left but to make up a rueful or grotesque effigy, and so to hang, burn, or otherwise destroy the god in the person of this sorry representative. By this time the original meaning of the ceremony may be so completely forgotten that the puppet is supposed to represent some historical personage, who earned the hatred and contempt of his fellows in his life, and whose memory has ever since been held up to eternal

execration by the annual destruction of his effigy. The figures of Haman, of the Carnival, and of Winter or Death which are or used to be annually destroyed in spring by Jews, Catholics, and the peasants of Central Europe respectively, appear to be all lineal descendants of those human incarnations of the powers of nature whose life and death were deemed essential to the welfare of mankind. But of the three the only one which has preserved a clear trace of its original meaning is the effigy of Winter or Death. In the others the ancient significance of the custom as a magical ceremony designed to direct the course of nature has been almost wholly obscured by a thick aftergrowth of legend and myth. The cause of this distinction is that, whereas the practice of destroying an effigy of Winter or Death has been handed down from time immemorial through generations of simple peasants, the festivals of Purim and the Carnival, as well as their Babylonian and Italian prototypes, the Sacaea and the Saturnalia, were for centuries domesticated in cities, where they were necessarily exposed to those thousand transforming and disintegrating currents of speculation and inquiry, of priestcraft and policy, which roll their turbid waters through the busy haunts of men, but leave undefiled the limpid springs of mythic fancy in the country.

CXI

CASTLES OF SAND [1]

The whole fabric of ancient mythology is so foreign to our modern ways of thought, and the evidence

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part VII. *Balder the Beautiful*, vol. i., Preface, p. xi.

concerning it is for the most part so fragmentary, obscure, and conflicting that in our attempts to piece together and interpret it we can hardly hope to reach conclusions that will completely satisfy either ourselves or others. In this as in other branches of study it is the fate of theories to be washed away like children's castles of sand by the rising tide of knowledge, and I am not so presumptuous as to expect or desire for mine an exemption from the common lot. I hold them all very lightly and have used them chiefly as convenient pegs on which to hang my collections of facts. For I believe that, while theories are transitory, a record of facts has a permanent value, and that as a chronicle of ancient customs and beliefs my book may retain its utility when my theories are as obsolete as the customs and beliefs themselves deserve to be.

CXII

THE STONE OF SISYPHUS [1]

The longer I occupy myself with questions of ancient mythology the more diffident I become of success in dealing with them, and I am apt to think that we who spend our years in searching for solutions of these insoluble problems are like Sisyphus perpetually rolling his stone up hill only to see it revolve again into the valley, or like the daughters of Danaus doomed for ever to pour water into broken jars that can hold no water. If we are taxed with wasting life in seeking to know what can never be known, and what, if it could be discovered, would not be worth

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part IV. *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, vol. i., Preface to the third edition, pp. ix-x.

knowing, what can we plead in our defence? I fear, very little. Such pursuits can hardly be defended on the ground of pure reason. We can only say that something, we know not what, drives us to attack the great enemy Ignorance wherever we see him, and that if we fail, as we probably shall, in our attack on his entrenchments, it may be useless but it is not inglorious to fall in leading a Forlorn Hope.

CXIII

THE RISE OF THE GODS, DECLINE OF MAGIC[1]

The conception of gods as superhuman beings endowed with powers to which man possesses nothing comparable in degree and hardly even in kind, has been slowly evolved in the course of history. By primitive peoples the supernatural agents are not regarded as greatly, if at all, superior to man; for they may be frightened and coerced by him into doing his will. At this stage of thought the world is viewed as a great democracy; all beings in it, whether natural or supernatural, are supposed to stand on a footing of tolerable equality. But with the growth of his knowledge man learns to conceive more clearly the vastness of nature and his own littleness and feebleness in presence of it. The recognition of his helplessness does not, however, carry with it a corresponding belief in the impotence of those supernatural beings with which his imagination peoples the universe. On the contrary, it enhances his conception of their power. For the idea of the world as a system of impersonal

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part I. *The Magic Art*, vol. i. pp. 373-374.

forces acting in accordance with fixed and invariable laws has not yet fully dawned or darkened upon him. The germ of the idea he certainly has, and he acts upon it, not only in magic art, but in much of the business of daily life. But the idea remains undeveloped, and so far as he attempts to explain the world he lives in, he pictures it as the manifestation of conscious will and personal agency. If then he feels himself to be so frail and slight, how vast and powerful must he deem the beings who control the gigantic machinery of nature! Thus as his old sense of equality with the gods slowly vanishes, he resigns at the same time the hope of directing the course of nature by his own unaided resources, that is, by magic, and looks more and more to the gods as the sole repositories of those supernatural powers which he once claimed to share with them. With the advance of knowledge, therefore, prayer and sacrifice assume the leading place in religious ritual; and magic, which once ranked with them as a legitimate equal, is gradually relegated to the background and sinks to the level of a black art. It is now regarded as an encroachment, at once vain and impious, on the domain of the gods, and as such encounters the steady opposition of the priests, whose reputation and influence rise or fall with those of their gods. Hence, when at a late period the distinction between religion and superstition has emerged, we find that sacrifice and prayer are the resource of the pious and enlightened portion of the community, while magic is the refuge of the superstitious and ignorant. But when, still later, the conception of the elemental forces as personal agents is giving way to the recognition of natural law; then magic, based as it implicitly

is on the idea of a necessary and invariable sequence of cause and effect, independent of personal will, reappears from the obscurity and discredit into which it had fallen, and, by investigating the causal sequences in nature, directly prepares the way for science. Alchemy leads up to chemistry.

CXIV

THE HOSTILITY OF RELIGION TO MAGIC[1]

This radical conflict of principle between magic and religion sufficiently explains the relentless hostility with which in history the priest has often pursued the magician. The haughty self-sufficiency of the magician, his arrogant demeanour towards the higher powers, and his unabashed claim to exercise a sway like theirs could not but revolt the priest, to whom, with his awful sense of the divine majesty, and his humble prostration in presence of it, such claims and such a demeanour must have appeared an impious and blasphemous usurpation of prerogatives that belong to God alone. And sometimes, we may suspect, lower motives concurred to whet the edge of the priest's hostility. He professed to be the proper medium, the true intercessor between God and man, and no doubt his interests as well as his feelings were often injured by a rival practitioner, who preached a surer and smoother road to fortune than the rugged and slippery path of divine favour.

Yet this antagonism, familiar as it is to us, seems to have made its appearance comparatively late in the history of religion. At an earlier stage the functions

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part I. *The Magic Art*, vol. i. pp. 226-227.

of priest and sorcerer were often combined or, to speak perhaps more correctly, were not yet differentiated from each other. To serve his purpose, man wooed the goodwill of gods or spirits by prayer and sacrifice, while at the same time he had recourse to ceremonies and forms of words which he hoped would of themselves bring about the desired result without the help of god or devil. In short, he performed religious and magical rites simultaneously; he uttered prayers and incantations almost in the same breath, knowing or recking little of the theoretical inconsistency of his behaviour, so long as by hook or crook he contrived to get what he wanted.

CXV

THE BELIEF IN THE OMNIPRESENCE OF DEMONS [1]

Bred in a philosophy which strips nature of personality and reduces it to the unknown cause of an orderly series of impressions on our senses, we find it hard to put ourselves in the place of the savage, to whom the same impressions appear in the guise of spirits or the handiwork of spirits. For ages the army of spirits, once so near, has been receding farther and farther from us, banished by the magic wand of science from hearth and home, from ruined cell and ivied tower, from haunted glade and lonely mere, from the riven murky cloud that belches forth the lightning, and from those fairer clouds that pillow the silver moon or fret with flakes of burning red the golden eve. The spirits are gone even from their

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part VI. *The Scapegoat*, pp. 72-73.

last stronghold in the sky, whose blue arch no longer passes, except with children, for the screen that hides from mortal eyes the glories of the celestial world. Only in poets' dreams or impassioned flights of oratory is it given to catch a glimpse of the last flutter of the standards of the retreating host, to hear the beat of their invisible wings, the sound of their mocking laughter, or the swell of angel music dying away in the distance.

Far otherwise is it with the savage. To his imagination the world still teems with those motley beings whom a more sober philosophy has discarded. Fairies and goblins, ghosts and demons, still hover about him both waking and sleeping. They dog his footsteps, dazzle his senses, enter into him, harass and deceive and torment him in a thousand freakish and mischievous ways. The mishaps that befall him, the losses he sustains, the pains he has to endure, he commonly sets down, if not to the magic of his enemies, to the spite or anger or caprice of the spirits. Their constant presence wearies him, their sleepless malignity exasperates him ; he longs with an unspeakable longing to be rid of them altogether, and from time to time, driven to bay, his patience utterly exhausted, he turns fiercely on his persecutors and makes a desperate effort to chase the whole pack of them from the land, to clear the air of their swarming multitudes, that he may breathe more freely and go on his way unmolested, at least for a time. Thus it comes about that the endeavour of primitive people to make a clean sweep of all their troubles generally takes the form of a grand hunting out and expulsion of devils or ghosts. They think that if they can only shake off these their accursed tormentors, they will

make a fresh start in life, happy and innocent; the tales of Eden and the old poetic Golden Age will come true again.

CXVI

GUARDED SPEECH [1]

When we survey the many forms of speech that have been either avoided or adopted from superstitious motives, we can hardly fail to be struck by the number of cases in which a fear of spirits, or of other beings regarded as spiritual and intelligent, is assigned as the reason for abstaining in certain circumstances from the use of certain words. The speaker imagines himself to be overheard and understood by spirits, or animals, or other beings whom his fancy endows with human intelligence; and hence he avoids certain words and substitutes others in their stead, either from a desire to soothe and propitiate these beings by speaking well of them, or from a dread that they may understand his speech and know what he is about when he happens to be engaged in that which, if they knew of it, would excite their anger or their fear. Hence the substituted terms fall into two classes according as they are complimentary or enigmatic; and these expressions are employed, according to circumstances, for different and even opposite reasons, the complimentary because they will be understood and appreciated, and the enigmatic because they will not.

We can now see why persons engaged in occupations like fishing, fowling, hunting, mining, reaping,

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part II. *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, pp. 416-418.

and sailing the sea, should abstain from the use of the common language and veil their meaning in strange words and dark phrases. For they have this in common that all of them are encroaching on the domain of the elemental beings, the creatures who, whether visible or invisible, whether clothed in fur or scales or feathers, whether manifesting themselves in tree or stone or running stream or breaking wave, or hovering unseen in the air, may be thought to have the first right to those regions of earth and sea and sky into which man intrudes only to plunder and destroy. Thus deeply imbued with a sense of the all-pervading life and intelligence of nature, man at a certain stage of his intellectual development cannot but be visited with fear or compunction, whether he is killing wild fowl among the stormy Hebrides, or snaring doves in the sultry thickets of the Malay Peninsula ; whether he is hunting the bear in Lapland snows or the tiger in Indian jungles, or hauling in the dripping net, laden with silvery herring, on the coast of Scotland ; whether he is searching for the camphor crystals in the shade of the tropical forest, or extracting the red gold from the darksome mine, or laying low with a sweep of his sickle the yellow ears on the harvest field.

In all these his depredations on nature, man's first endeavour apparently is by quietness and silence to escape the notice of the beings whom he dreads ; but if that cannot be, he puts the best face he can on the matter by dissembling his foul designs under a fair exterior, by flattering the creatures whom he proposes to betray, and by so guarding his lips, that, though his dark ambiguous words are understood well enough by his fellows, they are wholly unintelligible to his

victims. He pretends to be what he is not, and to be doing something quite different from the real business in hand. He is not, for example, a fowler catching pigeons in the forest; he is a Magic Prince or King Solomon himself inviting fair princesses into his palace tower or ivory hall. Such childish pretences suffice to cheat the guileless creatures whom the savage intends to rob or kill, perhaps they even impose to some extent upon himself; for we can hardly dissever them wholly from those forms of sympathetic magic in which primitive man seeks to effect his purpose by imitating the thing he desires to produce, or even by assimilating himself to it. It is hard indeed for us to conceive the mental state of a Malay wizard masquerading before wild pigeons in the character of King Solomon; yet perhaps the make-believe of children and of the stage, where we see the players daily forgetting their real selves in their passionate impersonation of the shadowy realm of fancy, may afford us some glimpse into the workings of that instinct of imitation or mimicry which is deeply implanted in the constitution of the human mind.

CXVII

ABBOT RICHALM ON DEVILS[1]

The earliest of the Greek philosophers, Thales, held that the world is full of gods or spirits; and the same primitive creed was expounded by one of the latest pagan thinkers of antiquity. Porphyry declared that demons appeared in the likeness of animals, that every house and every body was full of them, and that

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part VI. *The Scapegoat*, pp. 104-106.

forms of ceremonial purification, such as beating the air and so forth, had no other object but that of driving away the importunate swarms of these invisible but dangerous beings. He explained that evil spirits delighted in food, especially in blood and impurities, that they settled like flies on us at meals, and that they could only be kept at bay by ceremonial observances, which were directed, not to pleasing the gods, but simply and solely to beating off devils. His theory of religious purification seems faithfully to reflect the creed of the savage on this subject, but a philosopher is perhaps the last person whom we should expect to find acting as a mirror of savagery.

It is less surprising to meet with the same venerable doctrine, the same world-wide superstition in the mouth of a mediaeval abbot; for we know that a belief in devils has the authority of the founder of Christianity and is sanctioned by the teaching of the church. No Esquimau on the frozen shores of Labrador, no Indian in the sweltering forests of Guiana, no cowering Hindoo in the jungles of Bengal, could well have a more constant and abiding sense of the presence of malignant demons everywhere about him than had Abbot Richalm, who ruled over the Cistercian monastery of Schönthal in the first half of the thirteenth century. In the curious work to which he gave the name of *Revelations*, he set forth how he was daily and hourly infested by devils, whom, though he could not see, he heard, and to whom he imputed all the ailments of his flesh and all the frailties of his spirit. If he felt squeamish, he was sure that the feeling was wrought in him by demoniacal agency. If puckers appeared on his nose, if his lower lip drooped, the devils had again to answer for it; a cough, a cold in

the head, a hawking and spitting, could have none but a supernatural and devilish origin. If, pacing in his orchard on a sunny autumn morning, the portly abbot stooped to pick up the mellow fruit that had fallen in the night, the blood that mounted to his purple face was sent coursing thither by his invisible foes. If the abbot tossed on his sleepless couch, while the moonlight, streaming in at the window, cast the shadows of the stanchions like black bars on the floor of his cell, it was not the fleas and so forth that kept him awake—oh no! "Vermin", said he sagely, "do not really bite"; they seem to bite indeed, but it is all the work of devils. If a monk snored in the dormitory, the unseemly noise proceeded not from him, but from a demon lurking in his person. Especially dangerous were the demons of intoxication. These subtle fiends commonly lodged at the taverns in the neighbouring town, but on feast days they were apt to slip through the monastery gates and glide unseen among the monks seated at the refectory table, or gathered round the roaring fire on the hearth, while the bleak wind whistled in the abbey towers, and a more generous vintage than usual glowed and sparkled in the flagons. If at such times a jolly, rosy-faced brother appeared to the carnal eye and ear to grow obstreperous or maudlin, to speak thick or to reel and stagger in his gait, be sure it was not the fiery spirit of the grape that moved the holy man; it was a spirit of quite a different order. Holding such views on the source of all bodily and mental indisposition, it was natural enough that the abbot should prescribe remedies which are not to be found in the pharmacopoeia, and which would be asked for in vain at an apothecary's. They consisted chiefly of holy water and the sign of the cross; this

last he recommended particularly as a specific for flea-bites.

It is easy to suggest that the abbot's wits were unsettled, that he suffered from hallucinations, and so forth. This may have been so; yet a mode of thought like his seems to be too common over a great part of the world to allow us to attribute it purely to mental derangement. In the Middle Ages, when the general level of knowledge was low, a state of mind like Richalm's may have been shared by multitudes even of educated people, who have not, however, like him, left a monument of their folly to posterity. At the present day, through the advance and spread of knowledge, it might be difficult to find any person of acknowledged sanity holding the abbot's opinions on the subject of demons; but in remote parts of Europe a little research might show that the creed of Porphyry and Richalm is still held, with but little variation, by the mass of the people.

CXVIII

THE BELLS OF THE HIGH PRIEST [1]

In the Priestly Code it is ordained that the priest's robe should be made all of violet, and that the skirts of it should be adorned with a fringe of pomegranates wrought of violet and purple and scarlet stuff, with a golden bell between each pair of pomegranates. This gorgeous robe the priest was to wear when he ministered in the sanctuary, and the golden bells were to be heard jingling both when he entered into

[1] *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, vol. iii. pp. 446-447, 480.

the holy place and when he came forth, lest he should die.[1]

Why should the priest in his violet robe, with the fringe of gay pomegranates dangling at his heels, fear to die if the golden bells were not heard to jingle, both when he went into, and when he came forth from, the holy place? The most probable answer seems to be that the chiming of the holy bells was thought to drive far off the envious and wicked spirits who lurked about the door of the sanctuary, ready to pounce on and carry off the richly apparelled minister as he stepped across the threshold in the discharge of his sacred office. At least this view, which has found favour with some modern scholars, is strongly supported by analogy; for it has been a common opinion, from the days of antiquity downwards, that demons and ghosts can be put to flight by the sound of metal, whether it be the musical jingle of little bells, the deep-mouthed clangour of great bells, the shrill clash of cymbals, the booming of gongs, or the simple clink and clank of plates of bronze or iron knocked together or struck with hammers or sticks. Hence in rites of exorcism it has often been customary for the celebrant either to ring a bell which he holds in his hand, or to wear attached to some part of his person a whole nest of bells, which jingle at every movement he makes. . . .

These instances may suffice to show how widespread has been the use of bells in magical or religious rites, and how general has been the belief that their tinkle has power to banish demons. From a few of the examples which I have cited it appears that sometimes the sound of bells is supposed, not so much to

[1] Exodus xxviii. 31-35.

repel evil spirits, as to attract the attention of good or guardian spirits, but on the whole the attractive force of these musical instruments in primitive ritual is far less conspicuous than the repulsive. The use of bells for the purpose of attraction rather than of repulsion may correspond to that more advanced stage of religious consciousness when the fear of evil is outweighed by trust in the good, when the desire of pious hearts is not so much to flee from the Devil as to draw near to God. In one way or another the practices and beliefs I have collected may serve to illustrate and perhaps to explain the Jewish custom from which we started, whether it be that the priest in his violet robe, as he crossed the threshold of the sanctuary, was believed to repel the assaults of demons or to attract the attention of the deity by the chime and jingle of the golden bells.

CXIX

THE SOUND OF CHURCH BELLS [1]

In a famous passage of the *Purgatory* Dante has beautifully applied the conception of the Passing Bell to the sound of the Vesper Bell heard afar off by voyagers at sea, as if the bell were tolling for the death of day or of the sun then sinking in the crimson west. Hardly less famous is Byron's imitation of the passage :

> " Soft hour ! which wakes the wish and melts the heart
> Of those who sail the seas, on the first day
> When they from their sweet friends are torn apart ;
> Or fills with love the pilgrim on his way
> As the far bell of vesper makes him start,
> Seeming to weep the dying day's decay."

And the same thought has been no less beautifully

[1] *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, vol. iii. pp. 452-454.

applied by our poet Gray to the curfew bell heard at evening among the solemn yews and elms of an English churchyard :

" The curfew tolls the knell of parting day."

There is, indeed, something peculiarly solemnizing and affecting in the sound of church bells heard at such times and places ; it falls upon the ear, in the language of Froude, like the echo of a vanished world. The feeling was well expressed by the American poet Bret Harte, when he heard, or rather imagined that he heard, the Angelus rung at evening on the site of the long-abandoned Spanish mission at Dolores in California :

" Bells of the Past, whose long-forgotten music
Still fills the wide expanse,
Tingeing the sober twilight of the Present
With colour of Romance !

" I hear your call, and see the sun descending
On rock and wave and sand,
As down the coast the Mission voices, blending,
Girdle the heathen land.

" Within the circle of your incantation
No blight nor mildew falls ;
Nor fierce unrest, nor lust, nor low ambition
Passes those airy walls.

" Borne on the swell of your long waves receding,
I touch the farther past,—
I see the dying glow of Spanish glory,
The sunset dream and last.

. . . . . .

" O solemn bells ! whose consecrated masses
Recall the faith of old,—
O tinkling bells ! that lulled with twilight music
The spiritual fold ! "

A like sense of the power of bells to touch the heart and attune the mind to solemn thought is conveyed in

a characteristic passage of Renan, in whom the austere convictions of the religious sceptic were happily tempered by the delicate perceptions of the literary artist. Protesting against the arid rationalism of the German theologian Feuerbach, he exclaims, "Would to God that M. Feuerbach had steeped himself in sources of life richer than those of his exclusive and haughty Germanism! Ah! if, seated on the ruins of the Palatine or the Coelian Mount, he had heard the sound of the eternal bells lingering and dying over the deserted hills where Rome once was; or if, from the solitary shore of the Lido, he had heard the chimes of Saint Mark's expiring across the lagoons; if he had seen Assisi and its mystic marvels, its double basilica and the great legend of the second Christ of the Middle Ages traced by the brush of Cimabue and Giotto; if he had gazed his fill on the sweet far-away look of the Virgins of Perugino, or if, in San Domenico at Sienna, he had seen Saint Catherine in ecstasy, no, M. Feuerbach would not thus have cast reproach on one half of human poetry, nor cried aloud as if he would repel from him the phantom of Iscariot!"

Such testimonies to the emotional effect of church bells on the hearer are not alien from the folk-lore of the subject; we cannot understand the ideas of the people unless we allow for the deep colour which they take from feeling and emotion, least of all can we sever thought and feeling in the sphere of religion. There are no impassable barriers between the conceptions of the reason, the sensations of the body, and the sentiments of the heart; they are apt to melt and fuse into each other under waves of emotion, and few things can set these waves rolling more strongly than the power of music. A study of the emotional basis

of folk-lore has hardly yet been attempted ; inquirers have confined their attention almost exclusively to its logical and rational, or, as some might put it, to its illogical and irrational elements. But no doubt great discoveries may be expected from the future exploration of the influence which the passions have exerted in moulding the institutions and destiny of mankind.

CXX

RELIGION AND MUSIC[1]

In our own day a great religious writer, himself deeply sensitive to the witchery of music, has said that musical notes, with all their power to fire the blood and melt the heart, cannot be mere empty sounds and nothing more ; no, they have escaped from some higher sphere, they are outpourings of eternal harmony, the voice of angels, the Magnificat of saints. It is thus that the rude imaginings of primitive man are transfigured and his feeble lispings echoed with a rolling reverberation in the musical prose of Newman. Indeed the influence of music on the development of religion is a subject which would repay a sympathetic study. For we cannot doubt that this, the most intimate and affecting of all the arts, has done much to create as well as to express the religious emotions, thus modifying more or less deeply the fabric of belief to which at first sight it seems only to minister. The musician has done his part as well as the prophet and the thinker in the making of religion. Every faith has its appropriate music, and the difference between

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part IV. *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, vol. i. pp. 53-54.

the creeds might almost be expressed in musical notation. The interval, for example, which divides the wild revels of Cybele from the stately ritual of the Catholic Church is measured by the gulf which severs the dissonant clash of cymbals and tambourines from the grave harmonies of Palestrina and Handel. A different spirit breathes in the difference of the music.

CXXI

THE NATURE OF RELIGION [1]

There is probably no subject in the world about which opinions differ so much as the nature of religion, and to frame a definition of it which would satisfy every one is obviously impossible. All that a writer can do is, first, to say clearly what he means by religion, and afterwards to employ the word consistently in that sense throughout his work. By religion, then, I understand a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life. Thus defined, religion consists of two elements, a theoretical and a practical, namely, a belief in powers higher than man and an attempt to propitiate or please them. Of the two, belief clearly comes first, since we must believe in the existence of a divine being before we can attempt to please him. But unless the belief leads to a corresponding practice, it is not a religion but merely a theology ; in the language of St. James, "faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone". In other words, no man is religious who does not govern his conduct in some measure by the fear or love of God.

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part I. *The Magic Art*, vol. i. pp. 222-225.

On the other hand, mere practice, divested of all religious belief, is also not religion. Two men may behave in exactly the same way, and yet one of them may be religious and the other not. If the one acts from the love or fear of God, he is religious; if the other acts from the love or fear of man, he is moral or immoral according as his behaviour comports or conflicts with the general good. Hence belief and practice or, in theological language, faith and works are equally essential to religion, which cannot exist without both of them. But it is not necessary that religious practice should always take the form of a ritual; that is, it need not consist in the offering of sacrifice, the recitation of prayers, and other outward ceremonies. Its aim is to please the deity, and if the deity is one who delights in charity and mercy and purity more than in oblations of blood, the chanting of hymns, and the fumes of incense, his worshippers will best please him, not by prostrating themselves before him, by intoning his praises, and by filling his temples with costly gifts, but by being pure and merciful and charitable towards men, for in so doing they will imitate, so far as human infirmity allows, the perfections of the divine nature. It was this ethical side of religion which the Hebrew prophets, inspired with a noble ideal of God's goodness and holiness, were never weary of inculcating. Thus Micah says: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" And at a later time much of the force by which Christianity conquered the world was drawn from the same high conception of God's moral nature and the duty laid on men of conforming themselves to it. "Pure religion and undefiled", says St. James,

" before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

But if religion involves, first, a belief in superhuman beings who rule the world, and, second, an attempt to win their favour, it clearly assumes that the course of nature is to some extent elastic or variable, and that we can persuade or induce the mighty beings who control it to deflect, for our benefit, the current of events from the channel in which they would otherwise flow. Now this implied elasticity or variability of nature is directly opposed to the principles of magic as well as of science, both of which assume that the processes of nature are rigid and invariable in their operation, and that they can as little be turned from their course by persuasion and entreaty as by threats and intimidation. The distinction between the two conflicting views of the universe turns on their answer to the crucial question, Are the forces which govern the world conscious and personal, or unconscious and impersonal? Religion, as a conciliation of the superhuman powers, assumes the former member of the alternative. For all conciliation implies that the being conciliated is a conscious or personal agent, that his conduct is in some measure uncertain, and that he can be prevailed upon to vary it in the desired direction by a judicious appeal to his interests, his appetites, or his emotions. Conciliation is never employed towards things which are regarded as inanimate, nor towards persons whose behaviour in the particular circumstances is known to be determined with absolute certainty. Thus in so far as religion assumes the world to be directed by conscious agents who may be turned from their purpose by

persuasion, it stands in fundamental antagonism to magic as well as to science, both of which take for granted that the course of nature is determined, not by the passions or caprice of personal beings, but by the operation of immutable laws acting mechanically. In magic, indeed, the assumption is only implicit, but in science it is explicit. It is true that magic often deals with spirits, which are personal agents of the kind assumed by religion; but whenever it does so in its proper form, it treats them exactly in the same fashion as it treats inanimate agents, that is, it constrains or coerces instead of conciliating or propitiating them as religion would do. Thus it assumes that all personal beings, whether human or divine, are in the last resort subject to those impersonal forces which control all things, but which nevertheless can be turned to account by any one who knows how to manipulate them by the appropriate ceremonies and spells.

CXXII

THE TWO FORMS OF NATURAL RELIGION [1]

If we survey the natural religion of primitive peoples in all parts of the world, we shall probably discover that it everywhere assumes one of two forms, which, far from being incompatible with each other, are usually found to be embraced simultaneously and with equal confidence by the worshippers. One of them is the worship of nature, the other is the worship of the dead. I must say a few words about each.

First, in regard to the worship of nature, I mean by that the worship of natural phenomena conceived

[1] *The Worship of Nature*, vol. i. pp. 17-18.

as animated, conscious, and endowed with both the power and the will to benefit or injure mankind. Conceived as such they are naturally objects of human awe and fear. Their life and consciousness are supposed to be strictly analogous to those of men; they are thought to be subject to the same passions and emotions, and to possess powers which, while they resemble those of man in kind, often far exceed them in degree. Thus to the mind of primitive man these natural phenomena assume the character of formidable and dangerous spirits whose anger it is his wish to avoid, and whose favour it is his interest to conciliate. To attain these desirable ends he resorts to the same means of conciliation which he employs towards human beings on whose goodwill he happens to be dependent; he proffers requests to them, and he makes them presents; in other words, he prays and sacrifices to them; in short, he worships them. Thus what we may call the worship of nature is based on the personification of natural phenomena. Whether he acts deliberately in pursuance of a theory, or, as is more probable, instinctively in obedience to an impulse of his nature, primitive man at a certain stage, not necessarily the earliest, of his mental evolution attributes a personality akin to his own to all, or at all events to the most striking, of the natural objects, whether animate or inanimate, by which he is surrounded. This process of personification appears to be the principal, though it is probably not the only source of the worship of nature among simple folk.

The other form of natural religion is the worship of the dead. While it differs from the worship of nature in itself and in the presuppositions on which

it rests, it is perhaps equally diffused among men and has probably exerted at least an equal influence on their thought and institutions. The assumptions on which the worship of the dead is founded are mainly two: first, that the dead retain their consciousness and personality, and second, that they can powerfully influence the fortunes of the living for good or evil. To put it otherwise, the human soul is supposed to survive the death of the body and in its disembodied state to be capable of benefiting or injuring the survivors. Thus a belief in immortality, or at all events in the survival of consciousness and personality for an indefinite time after death, is the keystone of that propitiation or worship of the dead which has played a most important part in history and has been fraught with the most momentous consequences for good or evil to humanity.

CXXIII

ANIMISM [1]

When man began seriously to reflect on the nature of things, it was almost inevitable that he should explain them on the analogy of what he knew best, that is, by his own thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Accordingly he tended to attribute to everything, not only to animals, but also to plants and inanimate objects, a principle of life like that of which he was himself conscious, and which, for want of a better name, we are accustomed to call a soul. This primitive philosophy is commonly known as animism. It is a childlike interpretation of the universe in terms of man. Whether or not it was man's earliest attempt

[1] *The Worship of Nature*, vol. i. p. 6.

at solving the riddle of the world, we cannot say. The history of man on earth is long; the evidence of geology and archaeology appears to be continually stretching the life of the species farther and farther into the past. It may be that the animistic hypothesis is only one of many guesses at truth which man has successively formed and rejected as unsatisfactory. All we know is that it has found favour with many backward races down to our own time.

CXXIV

THE STRATIFICATION OF RELIGION [1]

To prevent misunderstandings it may be well to add that what I have said as to the stratification of three great types of religion or superstition corresponding to three great types of society is not meant to sketch, even in outline, the evolution of religion as a whole. I by no means wish to suggest that the reverence for wild animals and plants, the reverence for domestic cattle, and the reverence for cultivated plants are the only forms of religion or superstition which prevail at the corresponding stages of social development; all that I desire to convey is that they are characteristic of these stages respectively. The elements which make up any religious system are far too numerous and their interaction far too complex to be adequately summed up in a few simple formulas. To mention only a single factor of which I have taken no account in indicating roughly a certain correspondence between the strata of religion and of

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part V. *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*, vol. ii. pp. 36-37.

society, the fear of the spirits of the dead appears to have been one of the most powerful factors, perhaps, indeed, the most powerful of all, in shaping the course of religious evolution at every stage of social development from the lowest to the highest; and for that very reason it is not specially characteristic of any one form of society. And the three types of religion or superstition which I have selected as characteristic of three stages of society are far from being strictly limited each to its corresponding step in the social ladder. For example, although totemism, or a particular species of reverence paid by groups of men to wild animals and plants, probably always originated in the hunting stage of society, it has by no means been confined to that primitive phase of human development but has often survived not only into the pastoral but into the agricultural stage, as we may see for example by the case of many tribes in Africa, India, and America; and it seems likely that a similar overlapping of the various strata takes place in every instance. In short, we cannot really dissect the history of mankind as it were with a knife into a series of neat sections each sharply marked off from all the rest by a texture and colour of its own; we may indeed do so theoretically for the convenience of exposition, but practically the textures interlace, the colours melt and run into each other by insensible gradations that defy the edge of the finest instrument of analysis which we can apply to them. It is a mere truism to say that the abstract generalizations of science can never adequately comprehend all the particulars of concrete reality. The facts of nature will always burst the narrow bonds of human theories.

CXXV

THE TRANSFORMATION OF TOTEMS INTO GODS[1]

When, through the change of female to male kinship, and the settlement of a tribe in fixed abodes, society has ceased to present the appearance of a constantly shifting kaleidoscope of clans, and has shaken down into a certain stability and permanence of form, it might be expected that with the longer memory which accompanies an advance in culture the totems which have been generalized into the divinities of larger groups should no longer pass into oblivion, but should retain an elevated rank in the religious hierarchy, with the totems of the subordinate tribal divisions grouped under them either as subordinate divinities or as different manifestations of the general tribal gods. This appears to have been the state of totemism in Polynesia, where geographical conditions favoured an isolation and hence a permanence of the local groups such as was scarcely attainable by savages on the open plains of Australia or the prairies and savannahs of America. Hence in Polynesia we find a considerable approximation to a totem Olympus. In Samoa there were general village gods as well as gods of particular families; and the same deity is incarnate in the form of different animals. One god, for example, is incarnate in the lizard, the owl, and the centipede; another in the bat, domestic fowl, pigeon, and prickly sea urchin; another in the bat, the sea-eel, the cuttle-fish, the mullet, and the turtle;

[1] *Totemism and Exogamy*, vol. i. pp. 81-82.

another in the owl and the mullet ; another in the bird *Porphyris Samoensis*, the pigeon, the rail-bird, and the eel ; another in the turtle, sea-eel, octopus, and garden lizard. It seems a fair conjecture that such multiform deities are tribal or phratric totems, with the totems of the tribal or phratric subdivisions tacked on as incarnations. As the attribution of human qualities to the totem is of the essence of totemism, it is plain that a deity generalized from or including under him a number of distinct animals and plants must, as his animal and vegetable attributes contradict and cancel each other, tend more and more to throw them off and to retain only those human qualities which to the savage apprehension are the common element of all the totems whereof he is the composite product. In short, the tribal totem tends to pass into an anthropomorphic god. And as he rises more and more into human form, so the subordinate totems sink from the dignity of incarnations into the humbler character of favourites and clients ; until, at a later age, the links which bound them to the god having wholly faded from memory, a generation of mythologists arises who seek to patch up the broken chain by the cheap method of symbolism. But symbolism is only the decorous though transparent veil which a refined age loves to throw over its own ignorance of the past.

CXXVI

THE COMPLEX FABRIC OF RELIGION [1]

Having said so much of the misty glory which the human imagination sheds round the hard material

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part V. *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*, vol. i., Preface, pp. vii-ix.

realities of the food supply, I am unwilling to leave my readers under the impression, natural but erroneous, that man has created most of his gods out of his belly. That is not so, at least that is not my reading of the history of religion. Among the visible, tangible, perceptible elements by which he is surrounded—and it is only of these that I presume to speak—there are others than the merely nutritious which have exerted a powerful influence in touching his imagination and stimulating his energies, and so have contributed to build up the complex fabric of religion. To the preservation of the species the reproductive faculties are no less essential than the nutritive ; and with them we enter on a very different sphere of thought and feeling, to wit, the relation of the sexes to each other, with all the depths of tenderness and all the intricate problems which that mysterious relation involves. The study of the various forms, some gross and palpable, some subtle and elusive, in which the sexual instinct has moulded the religious consciousness of our race, is one of the most interesting, as it is one of the most difficult and delicate, tasks which await the future historian of religion.

But the influence which the sexes exert on each other, intimate and profound as it has been and must always be, is far indeed from exhausting the forces of attraction by which mankind are bound together in society. The need of mutual protection, the economic advantages of co-operation, the contagion of example, the communication of knowledge, the great ideas that radiate from great minds, like shafts of light from high towers, — these and many other things combine to draw men into communities, to drill them into regiments, and to set them marching on

the road of progress with a concentrated force to which the loose skirmishers of mere anarchy can never hope to oppose a permanent resistance. Hence when we consider how intimately humanity depends on society for many of the boons which it prizes most highly, we shall probably admit that of all the forces open to our observation which have shaped human destiny the influence of man on man is by far the greatest. If that is so, it seems to follow that among the beings, real or imaginary, which the religious imagination has clothed with the attributes of divinity, human spirits are likely to play a more important part than the spirits of plants, animals, or inanimate objects. I believe that a careful examination of the evidence, which has still to be undertaken, will confirm this conclusion ; and that if we could strictly interrogate the phantoms which the human mind has conjured up out of the depths of its bottomless ignorance and enshrined as deities in the dim light of temples, we should find that the majority of them have been nothing but the ghosts of dead men. However, to say this is necessarily to anticipate the result of future inquiry.

CXXVII

THE TRANSITION FROM ANIMISM TO MONOTHEISM [1]

The process of despiritualizing the universe, if I may be allowed to coin the phrase, has been a very slow and gradual one, lasting for ages. After men had peopled with a multitude of individual spirits every rock and hill, every tree and flower, every brook and

[1] *The Worship of Nature*, vol. i. pp. 9-10.

river, every breeze that blew, and every cloud that flecked with silvery white the blue expanse of heaven, they began, in virtue of what we may call the economy of thought, to limit the number of the spiritual beings of whom their imagination at first had been so prodigal. Instead of a separate spirit for every individual tree, they came to conceive of a god of the woods in general, a Silvanus or what not ; instead of personifying all the winds as gods, each with his distinct character and features, they imagined a single god of the winds, an Aeolus, for example, who kept them shut up in bags and could let them out at pleasure to lash the sea into fury. To put it otherwise, the innumerable multitude of spirits or demons was generalized and reduced to a comparatively small number of deities ; animism was replaced by polytheism. The world was now believed to be governed by a pantheon of gods and goddesses, with his or her individual character, powers, and functions, in virtue of which they were entrusted with the control of particular departments of nature or of human life. By this generalization the instinctive craving of the mind after simplification and unification of its ideas received a certain measure of satisfaction ; but the satisfaction was only partial and temporary. The intelligence could not finally acquiesce in the conception of a number of separate and more or less independent deities, whose inclinations and activities constantly conflicted with each other.

The same process of abstraction and generalization, the same desire for simplification and unification, which had evolved polytheism out of animism, now educed monotheism out of polytheism ; the many gods, who had long divided among them the sway of the world, were deposed in favour of one solitary deity,

the maker and controller of all things. At first this one God was conceived, for example, by the Jews, as regulating the whole course of nature by a series of arbitrary acts of will and as liable to be deflected from his purposes by judicious appeals to his passions or his interests. But as time went on, and the uniformity of nature and the immutability of natural law were gradually recognized and firmly established by every advance of science, it was found necessary, or advisable, to relieve the deity of his multifarious duties as the immediate agent of every event in the natural world, and to promote him, if I may say so, to a higher sphere in the supernatural world, as the creator or architect of the universe; while the management of affairs in this sublunary region was committed to his subordinate agents, the purely physical forces of attraction and repulsion, which modern science, if I apprehend it aright, appears to resolve into gravitation and electricity, or possibly into electricity alone. Thus the spiritualistic theory of the world has undergone a process of simplification and unification analogous to that undergone by the materialistic theory: as the materialistic hypothesis has reduced the multitudinous forms of matter to one substance, hydrogen, so the spiritualistic hypothesis has reduced the multitude of spirits to one God.

CXXVIII

ISIS AND THE MADONNA [1]

The Greeks conceived of Isis as a corn-goddess, for they identified her with Demeter. In a Greek

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part IV. *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, vol. ii. pp. 117-119.

epigram she is described as "she who has given birth to the fruits of the earth", and "the mother of the ears of corn"; and in a hymn composed in her honour she speaks of herself as "queen of the wheat-field", and is described as "charged with the care of the fruitful furrow's wheat-rich path". Accordingly, Greek or Roman artists often represented her with ears of corn on her head or in her hand.

Such, we may suppose, was Isis in the olden time, a rustic Corn-Mother adored with uncouth rites by Egyptian swains. But the homely features of the clownish goddess could hardly be traced in the refined, the saintly form which, spiritualized by ages of religious evolution, she presented to her worshippers of after days as the true wife, the tender mother, the beneficent queen of nature, encircled with the nimbus of moral purity, of immemorial and mysterious sanctity. Thus chastened and transfigured she won many hearts far beyond the boundaries of her native land. In that welter of religions which accompanied the decline of national life in antiquity her worship was one of the most popular at Rome and throughout the empire. Some of the Roman emperors themselves were openly addicted to it. And however the religion of Isis may, like any other, have been often worn as a cloak by men and women of loose life, her rites appear on the whole to have been honourably distinguished by a dignity and composure, a solemnity and decorum well fitted to soothe the troubled mind, to ease the burdened heart. They appealed therefore to gentle spirits, and above all to women, whom the bloody and licentious rites of other Oriental goddesses only shocked and repelled. We need not wonder, then, that in a period of decadence, when traditional faiths

were shaken, when systems clashed, when men's minds were disquieted, when the fabric of empire itself, once deemed eternal, began to show ominous rents and fissures, the serene figure of Isis with her spiritual calm, her gracious promise of immortality, should have appeared to many like a star in a stormy sky, and should have roused in their breasts a rapture of devotion not unlike that which was paid in the Middle Ages to the Virgin Mary. Indeed her stately ritual, with its shaven and tonsured priests, its matins and vespers, its tinkling music, its baptism and aspersions of holy water, its solemn processions, its jewelled images of the Mother of God, presented many points of similarity to the pomps and ceremonies of Catholicism. The resemblance need not be purely accidental. Ancient Egypt may have contributed its share to the gorgeous symbolism of the Catholic Church as well as to the pale abstractions of her theology. Certainly in art the figure of Isis suckling the infant Horus is so like that of the Madonna and child that it has sometimes received the adoration of ignorant Christians. And to Isis in her later character of patroness of mariners the Virgin Mary perhaps owes her beautiful epithet of *Stella Maris*, " Star of the Sea ", under which she is adored by tempest-tossed sailors. The attributes of a marine deity may have been bestowed on Isis by the sea-faring Greeks of Alexandria. They are quite foreign to her original character and to the habits of the Egyptians, who had no love of the sea. On this hypothesis Sirius, the bright star of Isis, which on July mornings rises from the glassy waves of the eastern Mediterranean, a harbinger of halcyon weather to mariners, was the true *Stella Maris*, " the Star of the Sea ".

CXXIX

THE VIRTUE OF TABOO [1]

Apparently holiness, magical virtue, taboo, or whatever we may call that mysterious quality which is supposed to pervade sacred or tabooed persons, is conceived by the primitive philosopher as a physical substance or fluid, with which the sacred man is charged just as a Leyden jar is charged with electricity; and exactly as the electricity in the jar can be discharged by contact with a good conductor, so the holiness or magical virtue in the man can be discharged and drained away by contact with the earth, which on this theory serves as an excellent conductor for the magical fluid. Hence, in order to preserve the charge from running to waste, the sacred or tabooed personage must be carefully prevented from touching the ground; in electrical language, he must be insulated, if he is not to be emptied of the precious substance or fluid with which he, as a vial, is filled to the brim. And in many cases apparently the insulation of the tabooed person is recommended as a precaution not merely for his own sake but for the sake of others; for since the virtue of holiness or taboo is, so to say, a powerful explosive which the smallest touch may detonate, it is necessary in the interest of the general safety to keep it within narrow bounds, lest, breaking out, it should blast, blight, and destroy whatever it comes into contact with.

But things as well as persons are often charged with the mysterious quality of holiness or taboo; hence it

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part VII. *Balder the Beautiful*, vol. i. pp. 6-7.

frequently becomes necessary for similar reasons to guard them also from coming into contact with the ground, lest they should in like manner be drained of their valuable properties and be reduced to mere commonplace material objects, empty husks from which the good grain has been eliminated.

CXXX

THE CONFESSION OF SINS [1]

It seems probable that originally the violation of taboo, in other words, sin, was conceived as something almost physical, a sort of morbid substance lurking in the sinner's body, from which it could be expelled by confession as by a sort of spiritual purge or emetic. This is confirmed by the form of auricular confession which is practised by the Akikuyu of Kenya in East Africa. Amongst them, we are told, "sin is essentially remissible; it suffices to confess it. Usually this is done to the sorcerer, who expels the sin by a ceremony of which the principal rite is a pretended emetic: *kotahikio*, derived from *tahika*, 'to vomit'." Thus among these savages the confession and absolution of sins is, so to say, a purely physical process of relieving a sufferer of a burden which sits heavy on his stomach rather than on his conscience. This view of the matter is again confirmed by the observation that these same Akikuyu resort to another physical mode of expelling sin from a sinner, and that is by the employment of a scapegoat, which by them, as by the Jews and many other

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part II. *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, pp. 214-215, 217-218.

people, has been employed as a vehicle for carting away moral rubbish and dumping it somewhere else. For example, if a Kikuyu man has committed incest, which would naturally entail his death, he produces a substitute in the shape of a he-goat, to which by an ignoble ceremony he transfers his guilt. Then the throat of the animal is cut, and the human culprit is purged of his sin by the vicarious suffering and death of the goat.

Thus at an early stage of culture the confession of sins wears the aspect of a bodily rather than of a moral and spiritual purgation ; it is a magical rather than a religious rite, and as such it resembles the ceremonies of washing, scouring, fumigation, and so forth, which in like manner are applied by many primitive peoples to the purification of what we should regard as moral guilt, but what they consider rather as a corporeal pollution or infection, which can be removed by the physical agencies of fire, water, fasts, purgatives, abrasion, scarification, and so forth. But when the guilt of sin ceases to be regarded as something material, a sort of clinging vapour of death, and is conceived as the transgression of the will of a wise and good God, it is obvious that the observance of these outward rites of purification becomes superfluous and absurd, a vain show which cannot appease the anger of the offended deity. The only means of turning away his wrath and averting the fatal consequences of sin is now believed to be the humble confession and true repentance of the sinner. At this stage of ethical evolution the practice of confession loses its old magical character as a bodily purge and assumes the new aspect of a purely religious rite, the propitiation of a great supernatural and moral being, who by a simple fiat can

cancel the transgression and restore the transgressor to a state of pristine innocence. This comfortable doctrine teaches us that in order to blot out the effects of our misdeeds we have only to acknowledge and confess them with a lowly and penitent heart, whereupon a merciful God will graciously pardon our sin and absolve us and ours from its consequences. It might indeed be well for the world if we could thus easily undo the past, if we could recall the words that have been spoken amiss, if we could arrest the long train that follows, like a flight of avenging Furies, on every evil action. But this we cannot do. Our words and acts, good and bad, have their natural, their inevitable consequences. God may pardon sin, but Nature cannot.

CXXXI

THE PERMANENCE OF SUPERSTITION [1]

If we examine the superstitious beliefs which are tacitly but firmly held by many of our fellow-countrymen, we shall find, perhaps to our surprise, that it is precisely the oldest and crudest superstitions which are most tenacious of life, while views which, though also erroneous, are more modern and refined, soon fade from the popular memory. For example, the high gods of Egypt and Babylon, of Greece and Rome, have for ages been totally forgotten by the people and survive only in the books of the learned; yet the peasants, who never even heard of Isis and Osiris, of Apollo and Artemis, of Jupiter and Juno, retain to this day a firm belief in witches and fairies, in ghosts and hobgoblins, those lesser creatures of the

[1] *The Scope of Social Anthropology*, pp. 170-171.

mythical fancy in which their fathers believed long before the great deities of the ancient world were ever thought of, and in which, to all appearance, their descendants will continue to believe long after the great deities of the present day shall have gone the way of all their predecessors. The reason why the higher forms of superstition or religion (for the religion of one generation is apt to become the superstition of the next) are less permanent than the lower is simply that the higher beliefs, being a creation of superior intelligence, have little hold on the minds of the vulgar, who nominally profess them for a time in conformity with the will of their betters, but readily shed and forget them as soon as these beliefs have gone out of fashion with the educated classes. But while they dismiss without a pang or an effort articles of faith which are only superficially imprinted on their minds by the weight of cultured opinion, the ignorant and foolish multitude cling with a sullen determination to far grosser beliefs which really answer to the coarser texture of their undeveloped intellect. Thus while the avowed creed of the enlightened minority is constantly changing under the influence of reflection and inquiry, the real, though unavowed, creed of the mass of mankind appears to be almost stationary, and the reason why it alters so little is that in the majority of men, whether they are savages or outwardly civilized beings, intellectual progress is so slow as to be hardly perceptible. The surface of society, like that of the sea, is in perpetual motion ; its depths, like those of the ocean, remain almost unmoved.

CXXXII

THE PRIMITIVE ARYAN [1]

It can hardly be too often repeated, since it is not yet generally recognized, that in spite of their fragmentary character the popular superstitions and customs of the peasantry are by far the fullest and most trustworthy evidence we possess as to the primitive religion of the Aryans. Indeed the primitive Aryan, in all that regards his mental fibre and texture, is not extinct. He is amongst us to this day. The great intellectual and moral forces which have revolutionized the educated world have scarcely affected the peasant. In his inmost beliefs he is what his forefathers were in the days when forest trees still grew and squirrels played on the ground where Rome and London now stand.

Hence every inquiry into the primitive religion of the Aryans should either start from the superstitious beliefs and observances of the peasantry, or should at least be constantly checked and controlled by reference to them. Compared with the evidence afforded by living tradition, the testimony of ancient books on the subject of early religion is worth very little. For literature accelerates the advance of thought at a rate which leaves the slow progress of opinion by word of mouth at an immeasurable distance behind. Two or three generations of literature may do more to change thought than two or three thousand years of traditional life. But the mass of the people who do not read books remain unaffected by the mental

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part I. *The Magic Art*, vol. i., Preface, pp. xi-xii.

revolution wrought by literature; and so it has come about that in Europe at the present day the superstitious beliefs and practices which have been handed down by word of mouth are generally of a far more archaic type than the religion depicted in the most ancient literature of the Aryan race.

CXXXIII

THE MENACE OF SUPERSTITION [1]

In civilized society most educated people are not even aware of the extent to which these relics of savage ignorance survive at their doors. The discovery of their wide prevalence was indeed only made last century, chiefly through the researches of the brothers Grimm in Germany. Since their day systematic inquiries carried on among the less educated classes, and especially among the peasantry, of Europe have revealed the astonishing, nay, alarming truth that a mass, if not the majority, of people in every civilized country is still living in a state of intellectual savagery, that, in fact, the smooth surface of cultured society is sapped and mined by superstition. Only those whose studies have led them to investigate the subject are aware of the depth to which the ground beneath our feet is thus, as it were, honeycombed by unseen forces. We appear to be standing on a volcano which may at any moment break out in smoke and fire to spread ruin and devastation among the gardens and palaces of ancient culture wrought so laboriously by the hands of many generations. After looking on the ruined Greek temples of Paestum and contrasting

[1] *The Scope of Social Anthropology*, pp. 169-170.

them with the squalor and savagery of the Italian peasantry, Renan said, " I trembled for civilization, seeing it so limited, built on so weak a foundation, resting on so few individuals even in the country where it is dominant."

CXXXIV

EUROPEAN BELIEF IN WITCHCRAFT [1]

We should deceive ourselves if we imagined that the belief in witchcraft is even now dead in the mass of the people; on the contrary, there is ample evidence to show that it only hibernates under the chilling influence of rationalism, and that it would start into active life if that influence were ever seriously relaxed. The truth seems to be that to this day the peasant remains a pagan and savage at heart; his civilization is merely a thin veneer which the hard knocks of life soon abrade, exposing the solid core of paganism and savagery below. The danger created by a bottomless layer of ignorance and superstition under the crust of civilized society is lessened, not only by the natural torpidity and inertia of the bucolic mind, but also by the progressive decrease of the rural as compared with the urban population in modern states; for I believe it will be found that the artisans who congregate in towns are far less retentive of primitive modes of thought than their rustic brethren. In every age cities have been the centres and as it were the lighthouses from which ideas radiate into the surrounding darkness, kindled by the friction of mind with mind in the crowded haunts of men; and it

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part VII. *Balder the Beautiful*, vol. i., Preface, pp. viii-ix.

is natural that at these beacons of intellectual light all should partake in some measure of the general illumination. No doubt the mental ferment and unrest of great cities have their dark as well as their bright side; but among the evils to be apprehended from them the chances of a pagan revival need hardly be reckoned.

CXXXV

SAINTS AS RAINMAKERS IN SICILY[1]

The reader may smile at the meteorology of the Far East, but precisely similar modes of procuring rain have been resorted to in Christian Europe within our own lifetime. By the end of April 1893 there was great distress in Sicily for lack of water. The drought had lasted six months. Every day the sun rose and set in a sky of cloudless blue. The gardens of the Conca d'Oro, which surround Palermo with a magnificent belt of verdure, were withering. Food was becoming scarce. The people were in great alarm. All the most approved methods of procuring rain had been tried without effect. Processions had traversed the streets and the fields. Men, women, and children, telling their beads, had lain whole nights before the holy images. Consecrated candles had burned day and night in the churches. Palm branches, blessed on Palm Sunday, had been hung on the trees. At Solaparuta, in accordance with a very old custom, the dust swept from the churches on Palm Sunday had been spread on the fields. In ordinary years these holy sweepings preserve the crops; but that year, if you will believe me, they had no effect what-

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part I. *The Magic Art*, vol. i. pp. 299-300.

ever. At Nicosia the inhabitants, bare-headed and bare-foot, carried the crucifixes through all the wards of the town and scourged each other with iron whips. It was all in vain. Even the great St. Francis of Paola himself, who annually performs the miracle of rain and is carried every spring through the market-gardens, either could not or would not help. Masses, vespers, concerts, illuminations, fire-works—nothing could move him. At last the peasants began to lose patience. Most of the saints were banished. At Palermo they dumped St. Joseph in a garden to see the state of things for himself, and they swore to leave him there in the sun till rain fell. Other saints were turned, like naughty children, with their faces to the wall. Others again, stripped of their beautiful robes, were exiled far from their parishes, threatened, grossly insulted, ducked in horse-ponds. At Caltanisetta the golden wings of St. Michael the Archangel were torn from his shoulders and replaced with wings of pasteboard; his purple mantle was taken away and a clout wrapt about him instead. At Licata the patron saint, St. Angelo, fared even worse, for he was left without any garments at all; he was reviled, he was put in irons, he was threatened with drowning or hanging. "Rain or the rope!" roared the angry people at him, as they shook their fists in his face.

CXXXVI

THE TRANSIENCE OF THE HIGHER RELIGIONS[1]

The quaint rites still practised at ploughing and sowing by the peasantry at opposite ends of

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part V. *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*, vol. ii. pp. 335.

Europe no doubt date from an extremely early age in the history of agriculture. They are probably far older than Christianity, older even than those highly developed forms of Greek religion with which ancient writers and artists have made us familiar, but which have been for so many centuries a thing of the past. Thus it happens that, while the fine flower of the religious consciousness in myth, ritual, and art is fleeting and evanescent, its simpler forms are comparatively stable and permanent, being rooted deep in those principles of common minds which bid fair to outlive all the splendid but transient creations of genius. It may be that the elaborate theologies, the solemn rites, the stately temples, which now attract the reverence or the wonder of mankind, are destined themselves to pass away like "all Olympus' faded hierarchy", and that simple folk will still cherish the simple faiths of their nameless and dateless forefathers, will still believe in witches and fairies, in ghosts and hobgoblins, will still mumble the old spells and make the old magic passes, when the muezzin shall have ceased to call the faithful to prayer from the minarets of St. Sophia, and when the worshippers shall gather no more in the long-drawn aisles of Notre Dame and under the dome of St. Peter's.

CXXXVII

THE RELIGION OF THE FOLK[1]

In India from the earliest times down to the present day the real religion of the common folk appears always to have been a belief in a vast multitude of

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part VI. *The Scapegoat*, pp. 89-90.

spirits, of whom many, if not most, are mischievous and harmful. As in Europe beneath a superficial layer of Christianity a faith in magic and witchcraft, in ghosts and goblins, has always survived and even flourished among the weak and ignorant, so it has been and so it is in the East. Brahmanism, Buddhism, Islam may come and go, but the belief in magic and demons remains unshaken through them all, and, if we may judge of the future from the past, is likely to survive the rise and fall of other historical religions. For the great faiths of the world, just in so far as they are the outcome of superior intelligence, of purer morality, of extraordinary fervour of aspiration after the ideal, fail to touch and move the common man. They make claims upon his intellect and his heart to which neither the one nor the other is capable of responding. The philosophy they teach is too abstract, the morality they inculcate too exalted for him. The keener minds embrace the new philosophy, the more generous spirits are fired by the new morality ; and as the world is led by such men, their faith sooner or later becomes the professed faith of the multitude. Yet with the common herd, who compose the great bulk of every people, the new religion is accepted only in outward show, because it is impressed upon them by their natural leaders whom they cannot choose but follow. They yield a dull assent to it with their lips, but in their heart they never really abandon their old superstitions ; in these they cherish a faith such as they cannot repose in the creed which they nominally profess ; and to these, in the trials and emergencies of life, they have recourse as to infallible remedies, when the promises of the higher faith have failed them, as indeed such promises are apt to do.

CXXXVIII

ORIENTAL RELIGIONS IN THE WEST [1]

The worship of the Great Mother of the Gods and her lover or son was very popular under the Roman Empire. Inscriptions prove that the two received divine honours, separately or conjointly, not only in Italy, and especially at Rome, but also in the provinces, particularly in Africa, Spain, Portugal, France, Germany, and Bulgaria. Their worship survived the establishment of Christianity by Constantine; for Symmachus records the recurrence of the festival of the Great Mother, and in the days of Augustine her effeminate priests still paraded the streets and squares of Carthage with whitened faces, scented hair, and mincing gait, while, like the mendicant friars of the Middle Ages, they begged alms from the passers-by. In Greece, on the other hand, the bloody orgies of the Asiatic goddess and her consort appear to have found little favour. The barbarous and cruel character of the worship, with its frantic excesses, was doubtless repugnant to the good taste and humanity of the Greeks, who seem to have preferred the kindred but gentler rites of Adonis. Yet the same features which shocked and repelled the Greeks may have positively attracted the less refined Romans and barbarians of the West. The ecstatic frenzies, which were mistaken for divine inspiration, the mangling of the body, the theory of a new birth and the remission of sins through the shedding of blood, have all their origin in savagery, and they naturally appealed to

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part IV. *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, vol. i. pp. 298-312.

peoples in whom the savage instincts were still strong. Their true character was indeed often disguised under a decent veil of allegorical or philosophical interpretation, which probably sufficed to impose upon the rapt and enthusiastic worshippers, reconciling even the more cultivated of them to things which otherwise must have filled them with horror and disgust.

The religion of the Great Mother, with its curious blending of crude savagery with spiritual aspirations, was only one of a multitude of similar Oriental faiths which in the later days of paganism spread over the Roman Empire, and by saturating the European peoples with alien ideals of life gradually undermined the whole fabric of ancient civilization. Greek and Roman society was built on the conception of the subordination of the individual to the community, of the citizen to the state; it set the safety of the commonwealth, as the supreme aim of conduct, above the safety of the individual whether in this world or in a world to come. Trained from infancy in this unselfish ideal, the citizens devoted their lives to the public service and were ready to lay them down for the common good; or if they shrank from the supreme sacrifice, it never occurred to them that they acted otherwise than basely in preferring their personal existence to the interests of their country. All this was changed by the spread of Oriental religions which inculcated the communion of the soul with God and its eternal salvation as the only objects worth living for, objects in comparison with which the prosperity and even the existence of the state sank into insignificance. The inevitable result of this selfish and immoral doctrine was to withdraw the devotee more and more from the public service, to concentrate his

thoughts on his own spiritual emotions, and to breed in him a contempt for the present life which he regarded merely as a probation for a better and an eternal. The saint and the recluse, disdainful of earth and rapt in ecstatic contemplation of heaven, became in popular opinion the highest ideal of humanity, displacing the old ideal of the patriot and hero who, forgetful of self, lives and is ready to die for the good of his country. The earthly city seemed poor and contemptible to men whose eyes beheld the City of God coming in the clouds of heaven. Thus the centre of gravity, so to say, was shifted from the present to a future life, and however much the other world may have gained, there can be little doubt that this one lost heavily by the change. A general disintegration of the body politic set in. The ties of the state and the family were loosened: the structure of society tended to resolve itself into its individual elements and thereby to relapse into barbarism; for civilization is only possible through the active co-operation of the citizens and their willingness to subordinate their private interests to the common good. Men refused to defend their country and even to continue their kind. In their anxiety to save their own souls and the souls of others they were content to leave the material world, which they identified with the principle of evil, to perish around them. This obsession lasted for a thousand years. The revival of Roman law, of the Aristotelian philosophy, of ancient art and literature at the close of the Middle Ages, marked the return of Europe to native ideals of life and conduct, to saner, manlier views of the world. The long halt in the march of civilization was over. The tide of Oriental invasion had turned at last. It is ebbing still.

Among the gods of Eastern origin who in the decline of the ancient world competed against each other for the allegiance of the West was the old Persian deity Mithra. The immense popularity of his worship is attested by the monuments illustrative of it which have been found scattered in profusion all over the Roman Empire. In respect both of doctrines and of rites the cult of Mithra appears to have presented many points of resemblance not only to the religion of the Mother of the Gods but also to Christianity. The similarity struck the Christian doctors themselves and was explained by them as a work of the devil, who sought to seduce the souls of men from the true faith by a false and insidious imitation of it. So to the Spanish conquerors of Mexico and Peru many of the native heathen rites appeared to be diabolical counterfeits of the Christian sacraments. With more probability the modern student of comparative religion traces such resemblances to the similar and independent workings of the mind of man in his sincere, if crude, attempts to fathom the secret of the universe, and to adjust his little life to its awful mysteries. However that may be, there can be no doubt that the Mithraic religion proved a formidable rival to Christianity, combining as it did a solemn ritual with aspirations after moral purity and a hope of immortality. Indeed the issue of the conflict between the two faiths appears for a time to have hung in the balance. An instructive relic of the long struggle is preserved in our festival of Christmas, which the Church seems to have borrowed directly from its heathen rival. In the Julian calendar the twenty-fifth of December was reckoned the winter solstice, and it was regarded as the Nativity of the Sun, because the

day begins to lengthen and the power of the sun to increase from that turning-point of the year. The ritual of the nativity, as it appears to have been celebrated in Syria and Egypt, was remarkable. The celebrants retired into certain inner shrines, from which at midnight they issued with a loud cry, "The Virgin has brought forth! The light is waxing!" The Egyptians even represented the new-born sun by the image of an infant which on his birthday, the winter solstice, they brought forth and exhibited to his worshippers. No doubt the Virgin who thus conceived and bore a son on the twenty-fifth of December was the great Oriental goddess whom the Semites called the Heavenly Virgin or simply the Heavenly Goddess; in Semitic lands she was a form of Astarte. Now Mithra was regularly identified by his worshippers with the Sun, the Unconquered Sun, as they called him; hence his nativity also fell on the twenty-fifth of December. The Gospels say nothing as to the day of Christ's birth, and accordingly the early Church did not celebrate it. In time, however, the Christians of Egypt came to regard the sixth of January as the date of the Nativity, and the custom of commemorating the birth of the Saviour on that day gradually spread until by the fourth century it was universally established in the East. But at the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century the Western Church, which had never recognized the sixth of January as the day of the Nativity, adopted the twenty-fifth of December as the true date, and in time its decision was accepted also by the Eastern Church. At Antioch the change was not introduced till about the year 375 A.D.

What considerations led the ecclesiastical authorities to institute the festival of Christmas? The

motives for the innovation are stated with great frankness by a Syrian writer, himself a Christian. "The reason", he tells us, "why the fathers transferred the celebration of the sixth of January to the twenty-fifth of December was this. It was a custom of the heathen to celebrate on the same twenty-fifth of December the birthday of the Sun, at which they kindled lights in token of festivity. In these solemnities and festivities the Christians also took part. Accordingly when the doctors of the Church perceived that the Christians had a leaning to this festival, they took counsel and resolved that the true Nativity should be solemnized on that day and the festival of the Epiphany on the sixth of January. Accordingly, along with this custom, the practice has prevailed of kindling fires till the sixth." The heathen origin of Christmas is plainly hinted at, if not tacitly admitted, by Augustine when he exhorts his Christian brethren not to celebrate that solemn day like the heathen on account of the sun, but on account of him who made the sun. In like manner Leo the Great rebuked the pestilent belief that Christmas was solemnized because of the birth of the new sun, as it was called, and not because of the nativity of Christ.

Thus it appears that the Christian Church chose to celebrate the birthday of its Founder on the twenty-fifth of December in order to transfer the devotion of the heathen from the Sun to him who was called the Sun of Righteousness. If that was so, there can be no intrinsic improbability in the conjecture that motives of the same sort may have led the ecclesiastical authorities to assimilate the Easter festival of the death and resurrection of their Lord to the festival of the death and resurrection of another Asiatic god

which fell at the same season. Now the Easter rites still observed in Greece, Sicily, and Southern Italy bear in some respects a striking resemblance to the rites of Adonis, and it may be that the Church consciously adapted the new festival to its heathen predecessor for the sake of winning souls to Christ. But this adaptation probably took place in the Greek-speaking rather than in the Latin-speaking parts of the ancient world; for the worship of Adonis, while it flourished among the Greeks, appears to have made little impression on Rome and the West. Certainly it never formed part of the official Roman religion. The place which it might have taken in the affections of the vulgar was already occupied by the similar but more barbarous worship of Attis and the Great Mother. Now the death and resurrection of Attis were officially celebrated at Rome on the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth of March, the latter being regarded as the spring equinox, and therefore as the most appropriate day for the revival of a god of vegetation who had been dead or sleeping throughout the winter. But according to an ancient and widespread tradition Christ suffered on the twenty-fifth of March, and accordingly some Christians regularly celebrated the Crucifixion on that day without any regard to the state of the moon. This custom was certainly observed in Phrygia, Cappadocia, and Gaul, and there seem to be grounds for thinking that at one time it was followed also in Rome. Thus the tradition which placed the death of Christ on the twenty-fifth of March was ancient and deeply rooted. It is all the more remarkable because astronomical considerations prove that it can have had no historical foundation. The inference appears to be inevitable that the passion

of Christ must have been arbitrarily referred to that date in order to harmonize with an older festival of the spring equinox. This is the view of the learned ecclesiastical historian Mgr. Duchesne, who points out that the death of the Saviour was thus made to fall upon the very day on which, according to a widespread belief, the world had been created. But the resurrection of Attis, who combined in himself the characters of the divine Father and the divine Son, was officially celebrated at Rome on the same day. When we remember that the festival of St. George in April has replaced the ancient pagan festival of the Parilia; that the festival of St. John the Baptist in June has succeeded to a heathen Midsummer festival of water; that the festival of the Assumption of the Virgin in August has ousted the festival of Diana; that the feast of All Souls in November is a continuation of an old heathen feast of the dead; and that the Nativity of Christ himself was assigned to the winter solstice in December because that day was deemed the Nativity of the Sun; we can hardly be thought rash or unreasonable in conjecturing that the other cardinal festival of the Christian church—the solemnization of Easter—may have been in like manner, and from like motives of edification, adapted to a similar celebration of the Phrygian god Attis at the vernal equinox.

At least it is a remarkable coincidence, if it is nothing more, that the Christian and the heathen festivals of the divine death and resurrection should have been solemnized at the same season and in the same places. For the places which celebrated the death of Christ at the spring equinox were Phrygia, Gaul, and apparently Rome, that is, the very regions

in which the worship of Attis either originated or struck deepest root. It is difficult to regard the coincidence as purely accidental. If the vernal equinox, the season at which in the temperate regions the whole face of nature testifies to a fresh outburst of vital energy, had been viewed from of old as the time when the world was annually created afresh in the resurrection of a god, nothing could be more natural than to place the resurrection of the new deity at the same cardinal point of the year. Only it is to be observed that if the death of Christ was dated on the twenty-fifth of March, his resurrection, according to Christian tradition, must have happened on the twenty-seventh of March, which is just two days later than the vernal equinox of the Julian calendar and the resurrection of Attis. A similar displacement of two days in the adjustment of Christian to heathen celebrations occurs in the festivals of St. George and the Assumption of the Virgin. However, another Christian tradition, followed by Lactantius and perhaps by the practice of the Church in Gaul, placed the death of Christ on the twenty-third and his resurrection on the twenty-fifth of March. If that was so, his resurrection coincided exactly with the resurrection of Attis.

In point of fact it appears from the testimony of an anonymous Christian, who wrote in the fourth century of our era, that Christians and pagans alike were struck by the remarkable coincidence between the death and resurrection of their respective deities, and that the coincidence formed a theme of bitter controversy between the adherents of the rival religions, the pagans contending that the resurrection of Christ was a spurious imitation of the resurrection of Attis, and the Christians asserting with equal warmth that

the resurrection of Attis was a diabolical counterfeit of the resurrection of Christ. In these unseemly bickerings the heathen took what to a superficial observer might seem strong ground by arguing that their god was the older and therefore presumably the original, not the counterfeit, since as a general rule an original is older than its copy. This feeble argument the Christians easily rebutted. They admitted, indeed, that in point of time Christ was the junior deity, but they triumphantly demonstrated his real seniority by falling back on the subtlety of Satan, who on so important an occasion had surpassed himself by inverting the usual order of nature.

Taken altogether, the coincidences of the Christian with the heathen festivals are too close and too numerous to be accidental. They mark the compromise which the Church in the hour of its triumph was compelled to make with its vanquished yet still dangerous rivals. The inflexible Protestantism of the primitive missionaries, with their fiery denunciations of heathendom, had been exchanged for the supple policy, the easy tolerance, the comprehensive charity of shrewd ecclesiastics, who clearly perceived that if Christianity was to conquer the world it could do so only by relaxing the too rigid principles of its Founder, by widening a little the narrow gate which leads to salvation. In this respect an instructive parallel might be drawn between the history of Christianity and the history of Buddhism. Both systems were in their origin essentially ethical reforms born of the generous ardour, the lofty aspirations, the tender compassion of their noble Founders, two of those beautiful spirits who appear at rare intervals on earth like beings come from a better world to support and

guide our weak and erring nature. Both preached moral virtue as the means of accomplishing what they regarded as the supreme object of life, the eternal salvation of the individual soul, though by a curious antithesis the one sought that salvation in a blissful eternity, the other in a final release from suffering, in annihilation. But the austere ideals of sanctity which they inculcated were too deeply opposed not only to the frailties but to the natural instincts of humanity ever to be carried out in practice by more than a small number of disciples, who consistently renounced the ties of the family and the state in order to work out their own salvation in the still seclusion of the cloister. If such faiths were to be nominally accepted by whole nations or even by the world, it was essential that they should first be modified or transformed so as to accord in some measure with the prejudices, the passions, the superstitions of the vulgar. This process of accommodation was carried out in after ages by followers who, made of less ethereal stuff than their masters, were for that reason the better fitted to mediate between them and the common herd. Thus, as time went on, the two religions, in exact proportion to their growing popularity, absorbed more and more of those baser elements which they had been instituted for the very purpose of suppressing. Such spiritual decadences are inevitable. The world cannot live at the level of its great men. Yet it would be unfair to the generality of our kind to ascribe wholly to their intellectual and moral weakness the gradual divergence of Buddhism and Christianity from their primitive patterns. For it should never be forgotten that by their glorification of poverty and celibacy both these religions struck straight at the root not merely

of civil society but of human existence. The blow was parried by the wisdom or the folly of the vast majority of mankind, who refused to purchase a chance of saving their souls with the certainty of extinguishing the species.

CXXXIX

THE PIETÀ OF MICHAEL ANGELO [1]

When we reflect how often the Church has skilfully contrived to plant the seeds of the new faith on the old stock of paganism, we may surmise that the Easter celebration of the dead and risen Christ was grafted upon a similar celebration of the dead and risen Adonis, which appears to have been celebrated in Syria at the same season. The type, created by Greek artists, of the sorrowful goddess with her dying lover in her arms, resembles and may have been the model of the *Pietà* of Christian art, the Virgin with the dead body of her divine Son in her lap, of which the most celebrated example is the one by Michael Angelo in St. Peter's. That noble group, in which the living sorrow of the mother contrasts so wonderfully with the languor of death in the son, is one of the finest compositions in marble. Ancient Greek art has bequeathed to us few works so beautiful, and none so pathetic.

CXL

THE HISTORICAL STUDY OF RELIGION [2]

That the historical study of religious beliefs, quite apart from the question of their truth or falsehood,

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part IV. *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, vol. i. pp. 256-257.
[2] *The Belief in Immortality*, vol. i. pp. 3-5.

is both interesting and instructive will hardly be disputed by any intelligent and thoughtful inquirer. Whether they have been well or ill founded, these beliefs have deeply influenced the conduct of human affairs ; they have furnished some of the most powerful, persistent, and far-reaching motives of action ; they have transformed nations and altered the face of the globe. No one who would understand the general history of mankind can afford to ignore the annals of religion. If he does so, he will inevitably fall into the most serious misconceptions even in studying branches of human activity which might seem, on a superficial view, to be quite unaffected by religious considerations.

Therefore to trace theological and in general religious ideas to their sources and to follow them through all the manifold influences which they have exerted on the destinies of our race must always be an object of prime importance to the historian, whatever view he may take of their speculative truth or ethical value. Clearly we cannot estimate their ethical value until we have learned the modes in which they have actually determined human conduct for good or evil : in other words, we cannot judge of the morality of religious beliefs until we have ascertained their history : the facts must be known before judgement can be passed on them : the work of the historian must precede the work of the moralist. Even the question of the validity or truth of religious creeds cannot, perhaps, be wholly dissociated from the question of their origin. If, for example, we discover that doctrines which we had accepted with implicit faith from tradition have their close analogies in the barbarous superstitions of ignorant savages,

we can hardly help suspecting that our own cherished doctrines may have originated in the similar superstitions of our rude forefathers; and the suspicion inevitably shakes the confidence with which we had hitherto regarded these articles of our faith. The doubt thus cast on our old creed is perhaps illogical, since even if we should discover that the creed did originate in mere superstition, in other words, that the grounds on which it was first adopted were false and absurd, this discovery would not really disprove the beliefs themselves, for it is perfectly possible that a belief may be true, though the reasons alleged in favour of it are false and absurd: indeed we may affirm with great probability that a multitude of human beliefs, true in themselves, have been accepted and defended by millions of people on grounds which cannot bear exact investigation for a moment. For example, if the crude fancies and cruel customs of savages concerning a life after death should have the effect of making the belief in immortality look exceedingly foolish, those of us who cherish the belief may console themselves by reflecting that a creed is not necessarily false because some of the reasons adduced in its favour are invalid, because it has sometimes been supported by the despicable tricks of vulgar imposture, and because the practices to which it has given rise have often been in the highest degree not only absurd but pernicious.

Thus an historical inquiry into the origin of religious creeds cannot, strictly speaking, invalidate, still less refute, the creeds themselves, though it may, and doubtless often does, weaken the confidence with which they are held. This weakening of religious faith as a consequence of a closer scrutiny of religious origins

is unquestionably a matter of great importance to the community ; for society has been built and cemented to a great extent on a foundation of religion, and it is impossible to loosen the cement and shake the foundation without endangering the superstructure. The candid historian of religion will not dissemble the danger incidental to his inquiries, but nevertheless it is his duty to prosecute them unflinchingly. Come what may, he must ascertain the facts so far as it is possible to do so ; having done that, he may leave to others the onerous and delicate task of adjusting the new knowledge to the practical needs of mankind. The narrow way of truth may often look dark and threatening, and the wayfarer may often be weary ; yet even at the darkest and weariest he will go forward in the trust, if not in the knowledge, that the way will lead at last to light and to rest ; in plain words, that there is no ultimate incompatibility between the good and the true.

CXLI

THE MOVEMENT OF THOUGHT[1]

If now we consider, on the one hand, the essential similarity of man's chief wants everywhere and at all times, and, on the other hand, the wide difference between the means he has adopted to satisfy them in different ages, we shall perhaps be disposed to conclude that the movement of the higher thought, so far as we can trace it, has on the whole been from magic through religion to science. In magic man depends on his own strength to meet the difficulties and dangers that beset him on every side. He believes in a certain

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part VII. *Balder the Beautiful*, vol. ii. pp. 304-308.

established order of nature on which he can surely count, and which he can manipulate for his own ends. When he discovers his mistake, when he recognizes sadly that both the order of nature which he had assumed and the control which he had believed himself to exercise over it were purely imaginary, he ceases to rely on his own intelligence and his own unaided efforts, and throws himself humbly on the mercy of certain great invisible beings behind the veil of nature, to whom he now ascribes all those far-reaching powers which he once arrogated to himself. Thus in the acuter minds magic is gradually superseded by religion, which explains the succession of natural phenomena as regulated by the will, the passion, or the caprice of spiritual beings like man in kind, though vastly superior to him in power.

But as time goes on this explanation in its turn proves to be unsatisfactory. For it assumes that the succession of natural events is not determined by immutable laws, but is to some extent variable and irregular, and this assumption is not borne out by closer observation. On the contrary, the more we scrutinize that succession the more we are struck by the rigid uniformity, the punctual precision with which, wherever we can follow them, the operations of nature are carried on. Every great advance in knowledge has extended the sphere of order and correspondingly restricted the sphere of apparent disorder in the world, till now we are ready to anticipate that even in regions where chance and confusion appear still to reign, a fuller knowledge would everywhere reduce the seeming chaos to cosmos. Thus the keener minds, still pressing forward to a deeper solution of the mysteries of the universe, come to reject the religious

theory of nature as inadequate, and to revert in a measure to the older standpoint of magic by postulating explicitly, what in magic had only been implicitly assumed, to wit, an inflexible regularity in the order of natural events, which, if carefully observed, enables us to foresee their course with certainty and to act accordingly. In short, religion, regarded as an explanation of nature, is displaced by science.

But while science has this much in common with magic that both rest on a faith in order as the underlying principle of all things, readers of this work will hardly need to be reminded that the order presupposed by magic differs widely from that which forms the basis of science. The difference flows naturally from the different modes in which the two orders have been reached. For whereas the order on which magic reckons is merely an extension, by false analogy, of the order in which ideas present themselves to our minds, the order laid down by science is derived from patient and exact observation of the phenomena themselves. The abundance, the solidity, and the splendour of the results already achieved by science are well fitted to inspire us with a cheerful confidence in the soundness of its method. Here at last, after groping about in the dark for countless ages, man has hit upon a clue to the labyrinth, a golden key that opens many locks in the treasury of nature. It is probably not too much to say that the hope of progress—moral and intellectual as well as material—in the future is bound up with the fortunes of science, and that every obstacle placed in the way of scientific discovery is a wrong to humanity.

Yet the history of thought should warn us against concluding that because the scientific theory of the

world is the best that has yet been formulated, it is necessarily complete and final. We must remember that at bottom the generalizations of science or, in common parlance, the laws of nature are merely hypotheses devised to explain that ever-shifting phantasmagoria of thought which we dignify with the high-sounding names of the world and the universe. In the last analysis, magic, religion, and science are nothing but theories of thought; and as science has supplanted its predecessors, so it may hereafter be itself superseded by some more perfect hypothesis, perhaps by some totally different way of looking at the phenomena—of registering the shadows on the screen—of which we in this generation can form no idea. The advance of knowledge is an infinite progression towards a goal that for ever recedes. We need not murmur at the endless pursuit:

> "*Fatti non foste a viver come bruti*
> *Ma per seguir virtute e conoscenza.*"

Great things will come of that pursuit, though we may not enjoy them. Brighter stars will rise on some voyager of the future—some great Ulysses of the realms of thought—than shine on us. The dreams of magic may one day be the waking realities of science. But a dark shadow lies athwart the far end of this fair prospect. For however vast the increase of knowledge and of power which the future may have in store for man, he can scarcely hope to stay the sweep of those great forces which seem to be making silently but relentlessly for the destruction of all this starry universe in which our earth swims as a speck or mote. In the ages to come man may be able to predict, perhaps even to control, the wayward courses of the

winds and clouds, but hardly will his puny hands have strength to speed afresh our slackening planet in its orbit or rekindle the dying fire of the sun. Yet the philosopher who trembles at the idea of such distant catastrophes may console himself by reflecting that these gloomy apprehensions, like the earth and the sun themselves, are only parts of that unsubstantial world which thought has conjured up out of the void, and that the phantoms which the subtle enchantress has evoked to-day she may ban to-morrow. They too, like so much that to common eyes seems solid, may melt into air, into thin air.

Without dipping so far into the future, we may illustrate the course which thought has hitherto run by likening it to a web woven of three different threads —the black thread of magic, the red thread of religion, and the white thread of science, if under science we may include those simple truths, drawn from observation of nature, of which men in all ages have possessed a store. Could we then survey the web of thought from the beginning, we should probably perceive it to be at first a chequer of black and white, a patchwork of true and false notions, hardly tinged as yet by the red thread of religion. But carry your eye farther along the fabric and you will remark that, while the black and white chequer still runs through it, there rests on the middle portion of the web, where religion has entered most deeply into its texture, a dark crimson stain, which shades off insensibly into a lighter tint as the white thread of science is woven more and more into the tissue. To a web thus chequered and stained, thus shot with threads of diverse hues, but gradually changing colour the farther it is unrolled, the state of modern thought, with all its divergent aims

and conflicting tendencies, may be compared. Will the great movement which for centuries has been slowly altering the complexion of thought be continued in the near future? or will a reaction set in which may arrest progress and even undo much that has been done? To keep up our parable, what will be the colour of the web which the Fates are now weaving on the humming loom of time? will it be white or red? We cannot tell. A faint glimmering light illumines the backward portion of the web. Clouds and thick darkness hide the other end.

PART IV

MAN AND IMMORTALITY

CXLII

THE BELIEF IN IMMORTALITY [1]

Of all the many forms which natural religion has assumed none probably has exerted so deep and far-reaching an influence on human life as the belief in immortality and the worship of the dead; hence an historical survey of this most momentous creed and of the practical consequences which have been deduced from it can hardly fail to be at once instructive and impressive, whether we regard the record with complacency as a noble testimony to the aspiring genius of man, who claims to outlive the sun and the stars, or whether we view it with pity as a melancholy monument of fruitless labour and barren ingenuity expended in prying into that great mystery of which fools profess their knowledge and wise men confess their ignorance.

CXLIII

THE PROBLEM OF DEATH [2]

The problem of death has very naturally exercised the minds of men in all ages. Unlike so many problems which interest only a few solitary thinkers this one concerns us all alike, since simpletons as well as sages must die, and even the most heedless and

[1] *The Belief in Immortality*, vol. i., Preface, pp. vii-viii.
[2] *The Belief in Immortality*, vol. i. pp. 31-33.

feather-brained can hardly help sometimes asking themselves what comes after death. The question is therefore thrust in a practical, indeed importunate form on our attention ; and we need not wonder that in the long history of human speculation some of the highest intellects should have occupied themselves with it and sought to find an answer to the riddle. Some of their solutions of the problem, though dressed out in all the beauty of exquisite language and poetic imagery, singularly resemble the rude guesses of savages. So little, it would seem, do the natural powers even of the greatest minds avail to pierce the thick veil that hides the end of life.

In saying that the problem is thrust home upon us all, I do not mean to imply that all men are constantly or even often engaged in meditating on the nature and origin of death. Far from it. Few people trouble themselves about that or any other purely abstract question : the common man would probably not give a straw for an answer to it. What he wants to know, what we all want to know, is whether death is the end of all things for the individual, whether our conscious personality perishes with the body or survives it for a time or for eternity. That is the enigma propounded to every human being who has been born into the world : that is the door at which so many inquirers have knocked in vain. Stated in this limited form the problem has indeed been of universal interest : there is no race of men known to us which has not pondered the mystery and arrived at some conclusions to which it more or less confidently adheres. Not that all races have paid an equal attention to it. On some it has weighed much more heavily than on others. While some races, like some

individuals, take death almost lightly, and are too busy with the certainties of the present world to pay much heed to the uncertainties of a world to come, the minds of others have dwelt on the prospect of a life beyond the grave till the thought of it has risen with them to a passion, almost to an obsession, and has begotten a contempt for the fleeting joys of this ephemeral existence by comparison with the hoped-for bliss of an eternal existence hereafter. To the sceptic, examining the evidence for immortality by the cold light of reason, such peoples and such individuals may seem to sacrifice the substance for the shadow: to adopt a homely comparison, they are like the dog in the fable who dropped the real leg of mutton from his mouth in order to snap at its reflection in the water. Be that as it may, where such beliefs and hopes are entertained in full force, the whole activity of the mind and the whole energy of the body are apt to be devoted to a preparation for a blissful or at all events an untroubled eternity, and life becomes, in the language of Plato, a meditation or practising of death. This excessive preoccupation with a problematic future has been a fruitful source of the most fatal aberrations both for nations and individuals. In pursuit of these visionary aims the few short years of life have been frittered away: wealth has been squandered: blood has been poured out in torrents: the natural affections have been stifled; and the cheerful serenity of reason has been exchanged for the melancholy gloom of madness.

> "Oh threats of Hell and Hopes of Paradise!
> One thing at least is certain—*This* Life flies;
> One thing is certain and the rest is Lies;
> The Flower that once has blown for ever dies."

The question whether our conscious personality survives after death has been answered by almost all races of men in the affirmative. On this point sceptical or agnostic peoples are nearly, if not wholly, unknown. Accordingly, if abstract truth could be determined, like the gravest issues of national policy, by a show of hands or a counting of heads, the doctrine of human immortality, or at least of a life after death, would deserve to rank among the most firmly established of truths; for were the question put to the vote of the whole of mankind, there can be no doubt that the ayes would have it by an overwhelming majority. The few dissenters would be overborne; their voices would be drowned in the general roar. For dissenters there have been even among savages. The Tongans, for example, thought that only the souls of noblemen are saved, the rest perish with their bodies. However, this aristocratic view has never been popular, and is not likely to find favour in our democratic age.

CXLIV

PRIMITIVE THEORIES OF DEATH [1]

Many savage races not only believe in a life after death; they are even of opinion that they would never die at all if it were not for the maleficent arts of sorcerers and witches, who cut the vital thread prematurely short. In other words, they disbelieve in what we call a natural death; they think that all men are naturally immortal in this life, and that every death which takes place is in fact a violent death inflicted by the hand of a human enemy,

[1] *The Belief in Immortality*, vol. i. pp. 33-34, 53, 56-58.

though in many or most cases the foe is invisible and works his fell purpose not by a sword or a spear but by witchcraft. . . . Without pursuing the theme further I think we may lay it down as a general rule that at a certain stage of social and intellectual evolution men have believed themselves to be naturally immortal in this life and have regarded death by disease or even by accident or violence as an unnatural event which has been brought about by sorcery or witchcraft, and which must be avenged by the death of the sorcerer or witch. If that has been so, we seem bound to conclude that a belief in sorcery or witchcraft has had a most potent influence in keeping down the numbers of savage tribes ; since as a rule every natural death has entailed at least one, often several, sometimes many deaths by violence. This may help us to understand what an immense power for evil the world-wide faith in malignant magic, that is, in sorcery or witchcraft, has been among men.

But even savages come in time to perceive that deaths are sometimes brought about by other causes than sorcery or witchcraft. Some of them admit extreme old age, accidents, and violence as causes of death which are independent of sorcery. The admission of these exceptions to the general rule certainly marks a stage of intellectual progress. . . .

The Melanesians and the Caffres, two widely different and widely separated races, agree in recognizing at least three distinct causes of what we should call natural death. These three causes are, first, sorcery or witchcraft ; second, ghosts or spirits ; and third, disease. That the recognition of disease in itself as a cause of death, quite apart from sorcery,

marks an intellectual advance, will not be disputed. It is not so clear, though I believe it is equally true, that the recognition of ghosts or spirits as a cause of disease, quite apart from sorcery, marks a real step in intellectual, moral, and social progress. In the first place, it marks a step in intellectual and moral progress; for it recognizes that effects which before had been ascribed to human agency spring from superhuman causes; and this recognition of powers in the universe superior to man is not only an intellectual gain but a moral discipline: it teaches the important lesson of humility. In the second place, it marks a step in social progress, because, when the blame of a death is laid upon a ghost or a spirit instead of on a sorcerer, the death has not to be avenged by killing a human being, the supposed author of the calamity. Thus the recognition of ghosts or spirits as the sources of sickness and death has as its immediate effect the sparing of an immense number of lives of men and women, who on the theory of death by sorcery would have perished by violence to expiate their imaginary crime. That this is a great gain to society is obvious: it adds immensely to the security of human life by removing one of the most fruitful causes of its destruction.

It must be admitted, however, that the gain is not always as great as might be expected; the social advantages of a belief in ghosts and spirits are attended by many serious drawbacks. For while ghosts or spirits are commonly, though not always, supposed to be beyond the reach of human vengeance, they are generally thought to be well within the reach of human persuasion, flattery, and bribery; in other words, men think that they can appease and propitiate them

by prayer and sacrifice; and while prayer is always cheap, sacrifice may be very dear, since it can, and often does, involve the destruction of an immense deal of valuable property and of a vast number of human lives. Yet if we could reckon up the myriads who have been slain in sacrifice to ghosts and gods, it seems probable that they would fall far short of the untold multitudes who have perished as sorcerers and witches. For while human sacrifices in honour of deities or of the dead have been for the most part exceptional rather than regular, only the great gods and the illustrious dead being deemed worthy of such costly offerings, the slaughter of witches and wizards, theoretically at least, followed inevitably on every natural death among people who attributed all such deaths to sorcery. Hence if natural religion be defined roughly as a belief in superhuman spiritual beings and an attempt to propitiate them, we may perhaps say that, while natural religion has slain its thousands, magic has slain its ten thousands. But there are strong reasons for inferring that in the history of society an Age of Magic preceded an Age of Religion. If that was so, we may conclude that the advent of religion marked a great social as well as intellectual advance upon the preceding Age of Magic: it inaugurated an era of what might be described as mercy by comparison with the relentless severity of its predecessor.

CXLV

THE FEAR OF DEATH [1]

A variety of causes has led the modern nations of western Europe to set on human life—their own life and that of others—a higher value than is put upon it by many other races. The result is a fear of death which is certainly not shared in the same degree of intensity by some peoples whom we in our self-complacency are accustomed to regard as our inferiors. Among the causes which thus tend to make us cowards may be numbered the spread of luxury and the doctrines of a gloomy theology, which by proclaiming the eternal damnation and excruciating torments of the vast majority of mankind has added incalculably to the dread and horror of death. The growth of humaner sentiments, which seldom fails to effect a corresponding amelioration in the character even of the gods, has indeed led many Protestant divines of late years to temper the rigour of the divine justice with a large infusion of mercy by relegating the fires of hell to a decent obscurity or even extinguishing them altogether. But these lurid flames appear to blaze as fiercely as ever in the more conservative theology of the Catholic Church.

CXLVI

THE CONTEMPT OF DEATH [2]

We should commit a grievous error were we to judge all men's love of life by our own, and to assume

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part III. *The Dying God*, pp. 135-136.
[2] *The Golden Bough*, Part III. *The Dying God*, p. 146.

that others cannot hold cheap what we count so dear. We shall never understand the long course of human history if we persist in measuring mankind in all ages and in all countries by the standard, perhaps excellent but certainly narrow, of the modern English middle class with their love of material comfort and "their passionate, absorbing, almost bloodthirsty clinging to life." That class, of which I may say, in the words of Matthew Arnold, that I am myself a feeble unit, doubtless possesses many estimable qualities, but among them can hardly be reckoned the rare and delicate gift of historical imagination, the power of entering into the thoughts and feelings of men of other ages and other countries, of conceiving that they may regulate their life by principles which do not square with ours, and may throw it away for objects which to us might seem ridiculously inadequate.

CXLVII

THE FALL OF MAN [1]

Arguing from the analogy of the moon or of animals which cast their skins, the primitive philosopher has inferred that in the beginning a perpetual renewal of youth was either appointed by a benevolent being for the human species or was actually enjoyed by them, and that but for a crime, an accident, or a blunder it would have been enjoyed by them for ever. People who pin their faith in immortality to the cast skins of serpents, lizards, beetles, and the like, naturally look on these animals as the hated rivals who have robbed us of the heritage which God or nature intended that

[1] *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, vol. i. pp. 76-77.

we should possess; consequently they tell stories to explain how it came about that such low creatures contrived to oust us from the priceless possession. Tales of this sort are widely diffused throughout the world, and it would be no matter for surprise to find them among the Semites. The story of the Fall of Man in the third chapter of Genesis appears to be an abridged version of this savage myth. Little is wanted to complete its resemblance to the similar myths still told by savages in many parts of the world. The principal, almost the only, omission is the silence of the narrator as to the eating of the fruit of the tree of life by the serpent, and the consequent attainment of immortality by the reptile. Nor is it difficult to account for the lacuna. The vein of rationalism which runs through the Hebrew account of creation, and has stripped it of many grotesque features that adorn or disfigure the corresponding Babylonian tradition, could hardly fail to find a stumbling-block in the alleged immortality of serpents; and the redactor of the story in its final form has removed this stone of offence from the path of the faithful by the simple process of blotting out the incident entirely from the legend. Yet the yawning gap left by his sponge has not escaped the commentators, who look in vain for the part which should have been played in the narrative by the tree of life. If my interpretation of the story is right, it has been left for the comparative method, after thousands of years, to supply the blank in the ancient canvas, and to restore, in all their primitive crudity, the gay barbaric colours which the skilful hand of the Hebrew artist had softened or effaced.

CXLVIII

DEATH DEEMED UNNECESSARY [1]

So much for savage stories of the origin of death. They all imply a belief that death is not a necessary part of the order of nature, but that it originated in a pure mistake or misdeed of some sort on somebody's part, and that we should all have lived happy and immortal if it had not been for that disastrous blunder or crime. Thus the tales reflect the frame of mind of many savages who still to this day believe all men to be naturally immortal and death to be nothing but an effect of sorcery. In short, whether we regard the savage's attitude to death at the present day or his ideas as to its origin in the remote past, we must conclude that primitive man cannot reconcile himself to the notion of death as a natural and necessary event; he persists in regarding it as an accidental and unnecessary disturbance of the proper order of nature. To a certain extent, perhaps, in these crude speculations he has anticipated certain views of modern biology. Thus it has been maintained by Professor August Weissmann that death is not a natural necessity, that many of the lowest species of living animals do in fact live for ever; and that in the higher animals the custom of dying has been introduced in the course of evolution for the purpose of thinning the population and preventing the degeneration of the species, which would otherwise follow through the gradual and necessary deterioration of the immortal individuals, who, though they could not die, might yet sustain much bodily

[1] *The Belief in Immortality*, vol. i. pp. 84-86.

damage through hard knocks in the hurly-burly of eternal existence on earth. A similar suggestion that death is not a natural necessity but an innovation introduced for the good of the breed has been made by our eminent English biologist, Mr. Alfred Russel Wallace. . . . Thus it appears that two of the most eminent biologists of our time agree with savages in thinking that death is by no means a natural necessity for all living beings. They only differ from savages in this, that whereas savages look upon death as the result of a deplorable accident, our men of science regard it as a beneficent reform instituted by nature as a means of adjusting the numbers of living beings to the quantity of the food supply, and so tending to the improvement and therefore on the whole to the happiness of the species.

CXLIX

THE PRIMITIVE CONCEPTION OF THE SOUL.[1]

As the savage commonly explains the processes of inanimate nature by supposing that they are produced by living beings working in or behind the phenomena, so he explains the phenomena of life itself. If an animal lives and moves, it can only be, he thinks, because there is a little animal inside which moves it: if a man lives and moves, it can only be because he has a little man or animal inside who moves him. The animal inside the animal, the man inside the man, is the soul. And as the activity of an animal or man is explained by the presence of the soul, so the repose of sleep or death is explained by its absence, sleep or trance being the temporary,

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part II. *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, pp. 26-27.

death being the permanent absence of the soul. Hence if death be the permanent absence of the soul, the way to guard against it is either to prevent the soul from leaving the body, or, if it does depart, to ensure that it shall return. The precautions adopted by savages to secure one or other of these ends take the form of certain prohibitions or taboos, which are nothing but rules intended to ensure either the continued presence or the return of the soul. In short, they are life-preservers or life-guards.

CL

THE SOUL CONCEIVED AS A SHADOW[1]

Often the savage regards his shadow or reflection as his soul, or at all events as a vital part of himself, and as such it is necessarily a source of danger to him. For if it is trampled upon, struck, or stabbed, he will feel the injury as if it were done to his person ; and if it is detached from him entirely (as he believes that it may be) he will die.

Where the shadow is regarded as so intimately bound up with the life of the man that its loss entails debility or death, it is natural to expect that its diminution should be regarded with solicitude and apprehension, as betokening a corresponding decrease in the vital energy of its owner. An elegant Greek rhetorician has compared the man who lives only for fame to one who should set all his heart on his shadow, puffed up and boastful when it lengthened, sad and dejected when it shortened, wasting and pining away when it dwindled to nothing. The spirits of such an one, he goes on, would necessarily

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part II. *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, pp. 77-78, 86-87.

be volatile, since they must rise or fall with every passing hour of the day. In the morning, when the level sun, just risen above the eastern horizon, stretched out his shadow to enormous length, rivalling the shadows cast by the cypresses and the towers on the city wall, how blithe and exultant would he be, fancying that in stature he had become a match for the fabled giants of old; with what a lofty port he would then strut and show himself in the streets and the market-place and wherever men congregated, that he might be seen and admired of all. But as the day wore on, his countenance would change, and he would slink back crestfallen to his house. At noon, when his once towering shadow had shrunk to his feet, he would shut himself up and refuse to stir abroad, ashamed to look his fellow-townsmen in the face; but in the afternoon his drooping spirits would revive, and as the day declined his joy and pride would swell again with the length of the evening shadows. The rhetorician who thus thought to expose the vanity of fame as an object of human ambition by likening it to an ever-changing shadow, little dreamed that in real life there were men who set almost as much store by their shadows as the fool whom he had conjured up in his imagination to point a moral. So hard is it for the straining wings of fancy to outstrip the folly of mankind.

CLI

THE BELIEF IN AN EXTERNAL SOUL[1]

Unable to conceive of life abstractly as a "permanent possibility of sensation" or a "continuous adjustment of internal arrangements to external

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part VII. *Balder the Beautiful*, vol. ii. pp. 95-96.

relations", the savage thinks of it as a concrete material thing of a definite bulk, capable of being seen and handled, kept in a box or jar, and liable to be bruised, fractured, or smashed in pieces. It is not needful that the life, so conceived, should be in the man ; it may be absent from his body and still continue to animate him by virtue of a sort of sympathy or action at a distance. So long as this object which he calls his life or soul remains unharmed, the man is well ; if it is injured, he suffers ; if it is destroyed, he dies. Or, to put it otherwise, when a man is ill or dies, the fact is explained by saying that the material object called his life or soul, whether it be in his body or out of it, has either sustained injury or been destroyed. But there may be circumstances in which, if the life or soul remains in the man, it stands a greater chance of sustaining injury than if it were stowed away in some safe and secret place. Accordingly, in such circumstances, primitive man takes his soul out of his body and deposits it for security in some snug spot, intending to replace it in his body when the danger is past. Or if he should discover some place of absolute security, he may be content to leave his soul there permanently. The advantage of this is that, so long as the soul remains unharmed in the place where he has deposited it, the man himself is immortal ; nothing can kill his body, since his life is not in it.

Evidence of this primitive belief is furnished by a class of folk-tales of which the Norse story of "The giant who had no heart in his body" is perhaps the best known example. Stories of this kind are widely diffused over the world, and from their number and the variety of incident and of details in which the leading idea is embodied, we may infer that the

conception of an external soul is one which has had a powerful hold on the minds of men at an early stage of history. For folk-tales are a faithful reflection of the world as it appeared to the primitive mind; and we may be sure that any idea which commonly occurs in them, however absurd it may seem to us, must once have been an ordinary article of belief. This assurance, so far as it concerns the supposed power of disengaging the soul from the body for a longer or shorter time, is amply corroborated by a comparison of the folk-tales in question with the actual beliefs and practices of savages.

CLII

THE RITUAL OF DEATH AND RESURRECTION[1]

Amongst many savage tribes, especially such as are known to practise totemism, it is customary for lads at puberty to undergo certain initiatory rites, of which one of the commonest is a pretence of killing the lad and bringing him to life again. Such rites become intelligible if we suppose that their substance consists in extracting the youth's soul in order to transfer it to his totem. For the extraction of his soul would naturally be supposed to kill the youth or at least to throw him into a death-like trance, which the savage hardly distinguishes from death. His recovery would then be attributed either to the gradual recovery of his system from the violent shock which it had received, or, more probably, to the infusion into him of fresh life drawn from the totem. Thus the essence of these initiatory rites, so far as they consist in a simulation of death and

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part VII. *Balder the Beautiful*, vol. ii. pp. 225-226.

resurrection, would be an exchange of life or souls between the man and his totem. The primitive belief in the possibility of such an exchange of souls comes clearly out in the story of the Basque hunter who affirmed that he had been killed by a bear, but that the bear had, after killing him, breathed its own soul into him, so that the bear's body was now dead, but he himself was a bear, being animated by the bear's soul. This revival of the dead hunter as a bear is exactly analogous to what, on the theory here suggested, is supposed to take place in the ceremony of killing a lad at puberty and bringing him to life again. The lad dies as a man and comes to life again as an animal; the animal's soul is now in him, and his human soul is in the animal. With good right, therefore, does he call himself a Bear or a Wolf or what not, according to his totem; and with good right does he treat the bears or the wolves or what not as his brethren, since in these animals are lodged the souls of himself and his kindred.[1]

[1] This was my first theory of totemism. It may be called the External Soul theory, because on it a totem is simply the receptacle in which a man keeps his soul, just as in fairy tales a warlock keeps his life in a parrot, and a giant keeps his heart in an egg in a duck Afterwards I discarded the External Soul theory for the Industrial theory, and still later for the Conceptional theory. See above, pp. 77 *sqq.*, 80 *sqq.* Perhaps, after all, my first theory is not wholly irreconcilable with my two later theories. Thus, for example, a man whose totem was an emu because the spirit of an emu was supposed to have entered his mother at conception (on the Conceptional theory) would naturally be thought peculiarly qualified to multiply emus for the good of the tribe (on the Industrial theory), and it might be deemed advisable that at puberty he should deposit his soul in an emu (on the External Soul theory) either for safety or in order to strengthen his connexion with the birds and so increase his power of magically multiplying them. On this view my three successive theories of totemism would turn out to be, not inconsistent with, but complementary to, each other.

CLIII

THE REASON FOR DEPOSITING THE SOUL OUTSIDE THE BODY[1]

Wherever totemism is found, and wherever a pretence is made of killing and bringing to life again the novice at initiation, there may exist or have existed not only a belief in the possibility of permanently depositing the soul in some external object—animal, plant, or what not—but an actual intention of so doing. If the question is put, why do men desire to deposit their life outside their bodies? the answer can only be that, like the giant in the fairy tale, they think it safer to do so than to carry it about with them, just as people deposit their money with a banker rather than carry it on their persons. At critical periods the life or soul is sometimes temporarily stowed away in a safe place till the danger is past. But institutions like totemism are not resorted to merely on special occasions of danger; they are systems into which every one, or at least every male, is obliged to be initiated at a certain period of life. Now the period of life at which initiation takes place is regularly puberty; and this fact suggests that the special danger which totemism and systems like it are intended to obviate is supposed not to arise till sexual maturity has been attained, in fact, that the danger apprehended is believed to attend the relation of the sexes to each other. It would be easy to prove by a long array of facts that the sexual relation is associated in the primitive mind with many serious perils; but

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part VII. *Balder the Beautiful*, vol. ii. pp. 277-278.

the exact nature of the danger apprehended is still obscure. We may hope that a more exact acquaintance with savage modes of thought will in time disclose this central mystery of primitive society, and will thereby furnish the clue, not only to totemism, but to the origin of the marriage system.

CLIV

SAVAGE BELIEFS AS TO THE SOULS OF ANIMALS [1]

The explanation of life by the theory of an indwelling and practically immortal soul is one which the savage does not confine to human beings but extends to the animate creation in general. In so doing he is more liberal and perhaps more logical than the civilized man, who commonly denies to animals that privilege of immortality which he claims for himself. The savage is not so proud; he commonly believes that animals are endowed with feelings and intelligence like those of men, and that, like men, they possess souls which survive the death of their bodies either to wander about as disembodied spirits or to be born again in animal form.

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The same motive which leads the primitive husbandman to adore the corn or the roots induces the primitive hunter, fowler, fisher, or herdsman to adore the beasts, birds, or fishes which furnish him with the means of subsistence. To him the conception of the death of these worshipful beings is naturally presented with singular force and distinctness; since it is no

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part V. *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*, vol. ii. p. 204; vol. i., Preface, p. vi; vol. ii. p. 208.

figurative or allegorical death, no poetical embroidery thrown over the skeleton, but the real death, the naked skeleton, that constantly thrusts itself importunately on his attention. And strange as it may seem to us civilized men, the notion of the immortality and even of the resurrection of the lower animals appears to be almost as familiar to the savage and to be accepted by him with nearly as unwavering a faith as the obvious fact of their death and destruction. For the most part he assumes as a matter of course that the souls of dead animals survive their decease; hence much of the thought of the savage hunter is devoted to the problem of how he can best appease the naturally incensed ghosts of his victims so as to prevent them from doing him a mischief. This refusal of the savage to recognize in death a final cessation of the vital process, this unquestioning faith in the unbroken continuity of all life, is a fact that has not yet received the attention which it seems to merit from inquirers into the constitution of the human mind as well as into the history of religion.

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Thus to the savage, who regards all living creatures as practically on a footing of equality with man, the act of killing and eating an animal must wear a very different aspect from that which the same act presents to us, who regard the intelligence of animals as far inferior to our own and deny them the possession of immortal souls. Hence on the principles of his rude philosophy the primitive hunter who slays an animal believes himself exposed to the vengeance either of its disembodied spirit or of all the other animals of the same species, whom he considers as knit together, like men, by the ties of kin and the obligations of the

blood feud, and therefore as bound to resent the injury done to one of their number. Accordingly the savage makes it a rule to spare the life of those animals which he has no pressing motive for killing, at least such fierce and dangerous animals as are likely to exact a bloody vengeance for the slaughter of one of their kind.

CLV

DREAMS AS A SOURCE OF BELIEF IN IMMORTALITY[1]

A review of the customs observed by savages for the conciliation and multiplication of animals which they hunt and kill is fitted to impress us with a lively sense of the unquestioning faith which primitive man reposes in the immortality of the lower creatures. He appears to assume as an axiom too obvious to be disputed that beasts, birds, and fishes have souls like his own, which survive the death of their bodies and can be reborn in other bodies to be again killed and eaten by the hunter. The whole series of customs —customs which are apt to strike the civilized reader as quaint and absurd—rests on this fundamental assumption. A consideration of them suggests a doubt whether the current explanation of the savage belief in human immortality is adequate to account for all the facts. That belief is commonly deduced from a primitive theory of dreams. The savage, it is said, fails to distinguish the visions of sleep from the realities of waking life, and accordingly when he has dreamed of his dead friends he necessarily

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part V. *The Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*, vol. ii. pp. 260-261.

concludes that they have not wholly perished, but that their spirits continue to exist in some place and some form, though in the ordinary course of events they elude the perceptions of his senses. On this theory the conceptions, whether gross or refined, whether repulsive or beautiful, which savages and perhaps civilized men have formed of the state of the departed, would seem to be no more than elaborate hypotheses constructed to account for appearances in dreams; these towering structures, for all their radiant or gloomy grandeur, for all the massy strength and solidity with which they present themselves to the imagination of many, may turn out on inspection to be mere visionary castles built of clouds and vapour, which a breath of reason suffices to melt into air.

But even if we grant for the sake of argument that this theory offers a ready explanation of the widespread belief in human immortality, it is less easy to see how the theory accounts for the corresponding belief of so many races in the immortality of the lower animals. In his dreams the savage recognizes the images of his departed friends by those familiar traits of feature, voice, and gesture which characterized them in life. But can we suppose that he recognizes dead beasts, birds, and fishes in like manner? that their images come before him in sleep with all the particular features, the minute individual differences, which distinguished them in life from their fellows, so that when he sees them he can say to himself, for example, "This is the very tiger that I speared yesterday; his carcase is dead, but his spirit must be still alive"; or, "That is the very salmon I caught and ate this morning; I certainly killed his body, but clearly I have not succeeded in destroying

his soul"? No doubt it is possible that the savage has arrived at his theory of animal immortality by some such process of reasoning, but the supposition seems at least more far-fetched and improbable than in the case of human immortality. And if we admit the insufficiency of the explanation in the one case, we seem bound to admit it, though perhaps in a less degree, in the other case also. In short, we conclude that the primitive theory of dreams appears to be hardly enough by itself to account for the widespread belief in the immortality of men and animals; dreams have probably done much to confirm that belief, but would they suffice to originate it? We may reasonably doubt it.

CLVI

LIFE AS AN INDESTRUCTIBLE ENERGY[1]

To the savage death presents itself not as a natural necessity but as a lamentable accident or crime that cuts short an existence which, but for it, might have lasted for ever. Thus arguing apparently from his own sensations he conceives of life as an indestructible kind of energy, which when it disappears in one form must necessarily reappear in another, though in the new form it need not be immediately perceptible by us; in other words, he infers that death does not destroy the vital principle nor even the conscious personality, but that it merely transforms both of them into other shapes, which are not the less real because they commonly elude the evidence of our senses. If I am right in thus interpreting the thought

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part V. *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*, vol. ii. pp. 261-263.

of primitive man, the savage view of the nature of life singularly resembles the modern scientific doctrine of the conservation of energy. According to that doctrine, no material energy ever perishes or is even diminished; when it seems to suffer diminution or extinction, all that happens is that a portion or the whole of it has been transmuted into other shapes which, though qualitatively different from, are quantitatively equivalent to, the energy in its original form. In short, if we listen to science, nothing in the physical world is ever lost, but all things are perpetually changing: the sum of energy in the universe is constant and invariable, though it undergoes ceaseless transformations. A similar theory of the indestructibility of energy is implicitly applied by the savage to explain the phenomena of life and death, and logically enough he does not limit the application to human beings but extends it to the lower animals. Therein he shows himself a better reasoner than his civilized brother, who commonly embraces with avidity the doctrine of human immortality but rejects with scorn, as derogatory to human dignity, the idea that animals have immortal souls. And when he attempts to confirm his own cherished belief in a life after death by appealing to similar beliefs among savages and inferring from them a natural instinct of immortality, it is well to remind him that, if he stands by that appeal, he must, like the savage, consistently extend the privilege of immortality to the despised lower animals; for surely it is improper for him to pick and choose his evidence so as to suit his prepossessions, accepting those parts of the savage creed which tally with his own and rejecting those which do not. On logical and scientific grounds he seems bound to believe either

more or less : he must hold that men and animals are alike immortal or that neither of them is so.

CLVII

EMPEDOCLES, HERBERT SPENCER, AND DARWIN [1]

So far as we can gather the real opinions of Pythagoras and Empedocles from the traditional history of the one and the miserably mutilated writings of the other, they seem both, like Buddha, with whom they had much in common, to have used the old savage doctrine of the transmigration of souls mainly as a handle by which to impress on the minds of their followers the necessity of leading an innocent, pure, and even ascetic life in this world as the only means of ensuring a blissful or at all events an untroubled eternity in a world to come. At least this is fairly certain for Empedocles, whose views are comparatively well known to us through the fragments of his philosophical writings. From these utterances of his, the genuineness of which seems to be beyond suspicion, we gather that the psychology of Empedocles was a curious blend of savagery and mysticism. He regarded the incarnation of the human soul in a body of any sort as a punishment for sin, a degradation, a fall from heaven, an exile from God, a banishment from a world of bliss to a world of woe. He describes the earth as a cavern, a joyless land, where men wander in darkness, a prey to murder and revenge, to swarms of foul fiends, to wasting sickness and decay. He speaks with

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part V. *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*, vol. ii. pp. 301-309.

pity and contempt of the life of mortals as a wretched and miserable existence, begotten of strife and sighs and prolonged as a punishment for their sins through a series of transmigrations, until, by the exercise of virtue, they have been born again as prophets, poets, physicians, and princes, and so return at last to communion with the gods to live thenceforth free from pain and sorrow, immortal, incorruptible, divine. This view of human destiny, this passionate scorn poured on the present world, this ecstatic aspiration after a blissful eternity, the reward of virtue in a world to come, are very alien from the cheerful serenity, the calm rationalism of the ordinary Greek attitude towards existence on earth. In his profound conviction of the manifold sufferings inseparable from mortality, in his longing to put off the burden of the body or what he calls " the garment of flesh " in his tenderness for the lower animals and his strong sense of kinship with them, Empedocles resembled Buddha, whose whole cast of thought, however, was tinged with a still deeper shade of melancholy, a more hopeless outlook on the future. Yet so close in some respects is the similarity between the two that we might incline to suppose a direct influence of Buddhism on Empedocles, were it not that the dates of the two great thinkers, so far as they can be ascertained, appear to exclude the supposition.

But if on its ethical side the teaching of Empedocles may almost be described as Buddhism relieved of its deepest shadows, on its scientific side it curiously anticipated some speculations which have deeply stirred the European mind in our own and our fathers' days. For to his savage psychology and religious mysticism Empedocles superadded a comprehensive

and grandiose theory of the material universe, which presents a close analogy to that of Herbert Spencer. The scientific doctrine of the conservation of energy or, as he preferred to call it, the persistence of force, which Spencer made the corner-stone of his system, has its counterpart in the Empedoclean doctrine of the conservation or indestructibility of matter, the sum of which, according to him, remains always constant, never undergoing either increase or diminution. Hence all the changes that take place in the physical world, according to Empedocles, resolve themselves into the integration and disintegration of matter, the composition and decomposition of bodies, brought about by the two antagonistic forces of attraction and repulsion, which in mythical language he called love and hate. And just as all particular things are evolved by the force of attraction and dissolved by the force of repulsion, a state of concentration or aggregation in the individual perpetually alternating with a state of diffusion or segregation, so it is also with the material universe as a whole. It, too, alternately contracts and expands according as the forces of attraction and repulsion alternately prevail. For it was the opinion of Empedocles that a long, perhaps immeasurable, period of time, during which the force of attraction prevails over the force of repulsion, is succeeded by an equally long period in which the force of repulsion prevails over the force of attraction, each period lasting till, the predominant force being spent, its action is first arrested and then reversed by the opposite force; so that the material universe performs a periodic and rhythmic movement of alternate contraction and expansion, which never ceases except at the moments when, the two opposite forces

exactly balancing each other, all things come to rest and equilibrium for a time, only however to return, with the backward sweep of the cosmic pendulum, to their former state either of consolidation or of dispersion. Thus, under the influence of attraction and repulsion, matter is constantly oscillating to and fro: at the end of a period of contraction it is gathered up in a solid globe: at the end of a period of expansion it is diffused throughout space in a state of tenuity which nowadays we might describe as gaseous. And this gigantic see-saw motion of the universe as a whole has gone on and will go on for ever and ever.

The imposing generalization thus formulated by Empedocles in the fifth century before our era was enunciated independently in the nineteenth century of our era by Herbert Spencer. Like his Greek predecessor, the modern English philosopher held that the material universe passes through alternate periods of concentration and dissipation, of evolution and dissolution, according as the forces of attraction and repulsion alternately prevail. The terms in which he sums up his general conclusions might be used with hardly any change to describe the conclusions of Empedocles. For the sake of comparison it may be well to subjoin the passage. It runs as follows:

"Thus we are led to the conclusion that the entire process of things, as displayed in the aggregate of the visible Universe, is analogous to the entire process of things as displayed in the smallest aggregates.

"Motion as well as matter being fixed in quantity, it would seem that the change in the distribution of Matter which Motion effects, coming to a limit in whichever direction it is carried, the indestructible Motion thereupon necessitates a reverse distribution.

Apparently, the universally coexistent forces of attraction and repulsion, which, as we have seen, necessitate rhythm in all minor changes throughout the Universe, also necessitate rhythm in the totality of its changes—produce now an immeasurable period during which the attractive forces predominating, cause universal concentration, and then an immeasurable period during which the repulsive forces predominating, cause universal diffusion — alternate eras of Evolution and Dissolution. And thus there is suggested the conception of a past during which there have been successive Evolutions analogous to that which is now going on ; and a future during which successive other such Evolutions may go on—ever the same in principle but never the same in concrete result."

The most recent researches in physical science tend apparently rather to confirm than to invalidate these general views of the nature of the universe ; for if modern physicists are right in regarding the constitution of matter as essentially electrical, the antagonistic forces of attraction and repulsion postulated by Empedocles and Spencer would resolve themselves into positive and negative electricity. On the other hand the atomic disintegration which is now known to be proceeding in certain of the chemical elements, particularly in uranium and radium, and which is probably proceeding in all, suggests a doubt whether the universe is really, as Spencer supposed, in process of integration and evolution and not rather in process of disintegration and dissolution ; or whether perhaps the apparent evolution of the organic world is not attended by a simultaneous dissolution of the inorganic, so that the fabric of the universe would be a sort of Penelope's web, which the great artificer weaves and

unweaves at the same time. With such a grave doubt to trouble the outlook on the future, we may perhaps say that Empedocles was wiser than Herbert Spencer in leaving, as he apparently did, the question undecided, whether during the epoch open to human observation the force of attraction or that of repulsion has been and is predominant, and consequently whether matter as a whole is integrating or disintegrating, whether all things are gradually evolving into more complex and concentrated forms, or are gradually dissolving and wasting away, through simpler and simpler forms, into the diffused tenuity of their primordial constituents.

Just as in his view of the constitution and history of the physical universe Empedocles anticipated to some extent the theories of Spencer, so in his view of the development of living beings he anticipated to some extent the theories of Darwin ; for he held that the existing species of animals have been evolved out of inorganic matter through intermediate sorts of monstrous creatures, which, being ill fitted to survive, gradually succumbed and were exterminated in the struggle for existence. Whether Empedocles himself clearly enunciated the principle of the survival of the fittest as well as the doctrine of evolution, we cannot say with certainty ; but at all events it is significant that Aristotle, after stating for the first time the principle of the survival of the fittest, illustrates it by a reference to Empedocles's theory of the extinction of monstrous forms in the past, as if he understood the theory to imply the principle.

It is a remarkable instance of the strange complexities and seeming inconsistencies of human nature, that a man whose capacious mind revolved ideas so

far-reaching and fruitful, should have posed among his contemporaries as a prophet or even as a god, parading the streets of his native city bedecked with garlands and ribbons and followed by obsequious crowds of men and women, who worshipped him and prayed to him that he would reveal to them the better way, that he would give them oracles and heal their infirmities. In the character of Empedocles, as in that of another forerunner of science, Paracelsus, the sterling qualities of the genuine student would seem to have been alloyed with a vein of ostentation and braggadocio ; but the dash of the mountebank which we may detect in his composition probably helped rather than hindered him to win for a time the favour and catch the ear of the multitude, ever ready as they are to troop at the heels of any quack who advertises his wares by a loud blast on a brazen trumpet. With so many claims on the admiration of the wise and the adulation of the foolish, we may almost wonder that Empedocles did not become the founder, if not the god, of a new religion.. Certainly other human deities have set up in practice and prospered with an intellectual stock-in-trade much inferior to that of the Sicilian philosopher. Perhaps Empedocles lacked that perfect sincerity of belief in his own pretensions without which it seems difficult or impossible permanently to impose on the credulity of mankind. To delude others successfully it is desirable, if not absolutely necessary, to begin by being one's self deluded, and the Sicilian sage was probably too shrewd a man to feel perfectly at ease in the character of a god.

The old savage doctrine of the transmigration of souls, which Empedocles furbished up and passed off on his disciples as a philosophical tenet, was after-

wards countenanced, if not expressly affirmed, by another Greek philosopher of a very different stamp, who united, as no one else has ever done in the same degree, the highest capacity for abstract thought with the most exquisite literary genius. But if he borrowed the doctrine from savagery, Plato, like his two predecessors, detached it from its rude original setting and fitted it into an edifying moral scheme of retributive justice. For he held that the transmigration of human souls after death into the bodies of animals is a punishment or degradation entailed on the souls by the weaknesses to which they had been subject or the vices to which they had been addicted in life, and that the kind of animal into which a peccant soul transmigrates is appropriate to the degree and nature of its weakness or guilt. Thus, for example, the souls of gluttons, sots, and rakes pass into the bodies of asses ; the souls of robbers and tyrants are born again in wolves and hawks ; the souls of sober quiet people untinctured by philosophy, come to life as bees and ants ; a bad poet may turn at death into a swan or a nightingale ; and a bad jester into an ape. Nothing but a rigid practice of the highest virtue and a single-minded devotion to abstract truth will avail to restore such degraded souls to their human dignity and finally raise them to communion with the gods. Though the passages in which these views are set forth have a mythical colouring and are, like all Plato's writings, couched in dramatic form and put into the mouths of others, we need not seriously doubt that they represent the real opinion of the philosopher himself. It is interesting and instructive to meet with the old savage theory of the transmigration of souls thus masquerading under a flowing drapery of morality and sparkling

with the gems of Attic eloquence in the philosophic system of a great Greek thinker. So curiously alike may be the solutions which the highest and the lowest intellects offer of those profound problems which in all ages have engaged the curiosity and baffled the ingenuity of mankind.

CLVIII

THE WORLD OF GHOSTS[1]

The circle of human knowledge, illuminated by the pale cold light of reason, is so infinitesimally small, the dark regions of human ignorance which lie beyond that luminous ring are so immeasurably vast, that imagination is fain to step up to the border line and send the warm, richly coloured beams of her fairy lantern streaming out into the darkness; and so, peering into the gloom, she is apt to mistake the shadowy reflections of her own figure for real beings moving in the abyss. In short, few men are sensible of the sharp line that divides the known from the unknown; to most men it is a hazy border-land where perception and conception melt indissolubly into one. Hence to the savage the ghosts of dead animals and men, with which his imagination peoples the void, are hardly less real than the solid shapes which the living animals and men present to his senses; and his thoughts and activities are nearly as much absorbed by the one as by the other. Of him it may be said with perhaps even greater truth than of his civilized brother, "What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue!"

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part V. *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*, vol. i., Preface, p. vii.

CLIX

THE FEAR OF GHOSTS [1]

The fear of ghosts is widespread, perhaps universal, among savages; it is hardly extinct among ourselves. If it were extinct, some learned societies might put up their shutters. Dead or alive, the fear of ghosts has certainly not been an unmixed blessing. Indeed it might with some show of reason be maintained that no belief has done so much to retard the economic and thereby the social progress of mankind as the belief in the immortality of the soul; for this belief has led race after race, generation after generation, to sacrifice the real wants of the living to the imaginary wants of the dead. The waste and destruction of life and property which this faith has entailed are enormous and incalculable. Without entering into details I will illustrate by a single example the disastrous economic, political, and moral consequences which flow from that systematic destruction of property which the fear of the dead has imposed on many races. Speaking of the Patagonians, the well-informed and intelligent traveller d'Orbigny observes: "They have no laws, no punishments inflicted on the guilty. Each lives as he pleases, and the greatest thief is the most highly esteemed, because he is the most dexterous. A motive which will always prevent them from abandoning the practice of theft, and at the same time will always present an obstacle to their ever forming fixed settlements, is the religious prejudice which, on the death of one of their number, obliges them to

[1] *Psyche's Task*[2], pp. 111-113.

destroy his property. A Patagonian, who has amassed during the whole of his life an estate by thieving from the whites or exchanging the products of the chase with neighbouring tribes, has done nothing for his heirs; all his savings are destroyed with him, and his children are obliged to rebuild their fortunes afresh,—a custom which, I may observe in passing, is found also among the Tamanaques of the Orinoco, who ravage the field of the deceased and cut down the trees which he has planted; and among the Yuracares, who abandon and shut up the house of the dead, regarding it as a profanation to gather a single fruit from the trees of his field. It is easy to see that with such customs they can nourish no real ambition, since their needs are limited to themselves; it is one of the causes of their natural indolence and is a motive which, so long as it exists, will always impede the progress of their civilization. Why should they trouble themselves about the future when they have nothing to hope from it? The present is all in all in their eyes, and their only interest is individual; the son will take no care of his father's herd, since it will never come into his possession; he busies himself only with his own affairs and soon turns his thoughts to looking after himself and getting a livelihood. This custom has certainly something to commend it from the moral point of view in so far as it destroys all the motives for that covetousness in heirs which is too often to be seen in our cities. The desire or the hope of a speedy death of their parents cannot exist, since the parents leave absolutely nothing to their children; but, on the other hand, if the Patagonians had preserved hereditary properties, they would without doubt have been to-day in possession

of numerous herds, and would necessarily have been more formidable to the whites, since their power in that case would have been more than doubled, whereas their present habits will infallibly leave them in a stationary state, from which nothing but a radical change will be able to deliver them." Thus poverty, indolence, improvidence, political weakness, and all the hardships of a nomadic life are the miserable inheritance which the fear of the dead entails on these wretched Indians. Heavy indeed is the toll which superstition exacts from all who pass within her gloomy portal.

But we are not here concerned with the disastrous and deplorable consequences, the unspeakable follies and crimes and miseries, which have flowed in practice from the theory of a future life. We are dealing at present with the more cheerful side of the subject, with the wholesome, though groundless, terror which ghosts, apparitions, and spectres strike into the breasts of hardened ruffians and desperadoes. So far as such persons reflect at all and regulate their passions by the dictates of prudence, it seems plain that a fear of ghostly retribution, of the angry spirit of their victim, must act as a salutary restraint on their disorderly impulses ; it must reinforce the dread of purely secular punishment and furnish the choleric and malicious with a fresh motive for pausing before they imbrue their hands in blood.

CLX

SALUTARY EFFECT OF THE FEAR OF GHOSTS[1]

While the fear of the ghost has operated directly to enhance the sanctity of human life by deterring the cruel, the passionate, and the malignant from the shedding of blood, it has operated also indirectly to bring about the same salutary result. For not only does the hag-ridden murderer himself dread his victim's ghost, but the whole community dreads it also and believes itself endangered by the murderer's presence, since the wrathful spirit which pursues him may turn on other people and rend them. Hence society has a strong motive for secluding, banishing, or exterminating the culprit in order to free itself from what it believes to be an imminent danger, a perilous pollution, a contagion of death. To put it in another way, the community has an interest in punishing homicide. Not that the treatment of homicides by the tribe or the State was originally conceived as a punishment inflicted on them: rather it was viewed as a measure of self-defence, a moral quarantine, a process of spiritual purification and disinfection, an exorcism. It was a mode of cleansing the people generally and sometimes the homicide himself from the ghostly infection, which to the primitive mind appears to be something material and tangible, something that can be literally washed or scoured away by water, pig's blood, sheep's blood, or other detergents. But when this purification took the form of laying the manslayer under restraint, banishing

[1] *Psyche's Task*[2], pp. 151-153.

him from the country, or putting him to death in order to appease his victim's ghost, it was for all practical purposes indistinguishable from punishment, and the fear of it would act as a deterrent just as surely as if it had been designed to be a punishment and nothing else. When a man is about to be hanged, it is little consolation to him to be told that hanging is not a punishment but a purification. But the one conception slides easily and almost imperceptibly into the other; so that what was at first a religious rite, a solemn consecration or sacrifice, comes in course of time to be a purely civil function, the penalty which society exacts from those who have injured it: the sacrifice becomes an execution, the priest steps back and the hangman comes forward. Thus criminal justice was probably based in large measure on a crude form of superstition long before the subtle brains of jurists and philosophers deduced it logically, according to their various predilections, from a rigid theory of righteous retribution, a far-sighted policy of making the law a terror to evil-doers, or a benevolent desire to reform the criminal's character and save his soul in another world by hanging or burning his body in this one. If these deductions only profess to justify theoretically the practice of capital punishment, they may be well or ill founded; but if they claim to explain it historically, they are certainly false. You cannot thus reconstruct the past by importing into one age the ideas of another, by interpreting the earliest in terms of the latest products of mental evolution. You may make revolutions in that way, but you cannot write history.

If these views are correct, the dread of the ghost has operated in a twofold way to protect human life.

On the one hand it has made every individual for his own sake more reluctant to slay his fellow, and on the other hand it has roused the whole community to punish the slayer. It has placed every man's life within a double ring-fence of morality and law. The hot-headed and the cold-hearted have been furnished with a double motive for abstaining from the last fatal step : they have had to fear the spirit of their victim on the one side and the lash of the law on the other : they are in a strait between the devil and the deep sea, between the ghost and the gallows. And when with the progress of thought the shadow of the ghost passes away, the grim shadow of the gallows remains to protect society without the aid of superstitious terrors. It is thus that custom often outlives the motive which originated it. If only an institution is good in practice, it will stand firm after its old theoretical basis has been shattered : a new and more solid, because a truer, foundation will be discovered for it to rest upon. More and more, as time goes on, morality shifts its ground from the sands of superstition to the rock of reason, from the imaginary to the real, from the supernatural to the natural. In the present case the State has not ceased to protect the lives of its peaceful citizens because the faith in ghosts is shaken. It has found a better reason than old wives' fables for guarding with the flaming sword of Justice the approach to the Tree of Life.

CLXI

THE WORSHIP OF THE DEAD [1]

To judge by the accounts we possess not only of savage and barbarous tribes but of some highly civilized peoples, the worship of the human dead has been one of the commonest and most influential forms of natural religion, perhaps indeed the commonest and most influential of all. Obviously it rests on the supposition that the human personality in some form, whether we call it a soul, a spirit, a ghost, or what not, can survive death and thereafter continue for a longer or shorter time to exercise great power for good or evil over the destinies of the living, who are therefore compelled to propitiate the shades of the dead out of a regard for their own safety and well-being. This belief in the survival of the human spirit after death is world-wide ; it is found among men in all stages of culture from the lowest to the highest ; we need not wonder therefore that the custom of propitiating the ghosts or souls of the departed should be world-wide also. No doubt the degree of attention paid to ghosts is not the same in all cases ; it varies with the particular degree of power attributed to each of them ; the spirits of men who for any reason were much feared in their lifetime, such as mighty warriors, chiefs, and kings, are more revered and receive far more marks of homage than the spirits of common men ; and it is only when this reverence and homage are carried to a very high pitch that they can properly be described as a deification of the dead. But that dead men have thus been

[1] *The Belief in Immortality*, vol. i. pp. 23-29.

raised to the rank of deities in many lands, there is abundant evidence to prove. And quite apart from the worship paid to those spirits which are admitted by their worshippers to have once animated the bodies of living men, there is good reason to suspect that many gods, who rank as purely mythical beings, were once men of flesh and blood, though their true history has passed out of memory or rather been transformed by legend into a myth, which veils more or less completely the real character of the imaginary deity. The theory that most or all gods originated after this fashion, in other words, that the worship of the gods is little or nothing but the worship of dead men, is known as Euhemerism, from Euhemerus, the ancient Greek writer who propounded it. Regarded as a universal explanation of the belief in gods it is certainly false ; regarded as a partial explanation of the belief it is unquestionably true ; and perhaps we may even go farther and say, that the more we penetrate into the inner history of natural religion, the larger is seen to be the element of truth contained in Euhemerism. For the more closely we look at many deities of natural religion, the more distinctly do we seem to perceive, under the quaint or splendid pall which the mythical fancy has wrapt round their stately figures, the familiar features of real men. who once shared the common joys and the common sorrows of humanity, who trod life's common road to the common end.

When we ask how it comes about that dead men have so often been raised to the rank of divinities, the first thing to be observed is that all such deifications must, if our theory is correct, be inferences drawn from experience of some sort ; they must be hypotheses devised to explain the unperceived causes of certain

phenomena, whether of the human mind or of external nature. All of them imply, as I have said, a belief that the conscious human personality, call it the soul, the spirit, or what you please, can survive the body and continue to exist in a disembodied state with unabated or even greatly increased powers for good or evil. This faith in the survival of personality after death may for the sake of brevity be called a faith in immortality, though the term immortality is not strictly correct, since it seems to imply eternal duration, whereas the idea of eternity is hardly intelligible to many primitive peoples, who nevertheless firmly believe in the continued existence, for a longer or shorter time, of the human spirit after the dissolution of the body. Now the faith in the immortality of the soul or, to speak more correctly, in the continued existence of conscious human personality after death, is exceedingly common among men at all levels of intellectual evolution from the lowest upwards; certainly it is not peculiar to adherents of the higher religions, but is held as an unquestionable truth by at least the great majority of savage and barbarous peoples as to whose ideas we possess accurate information; indeed it might be hard to point to any single tribe of men, however savage, of whom we could say with certainty that the faith is totally wanting among them.

Hence if we are to explain the deification of dead men, we must first explain the widespread belief in immortality; we must answer the question, how does it happen that men in all countries and at all stages of ignorance or knowledge so commonly suppose that when they die their consciousness will still persist for an indefinite time after the decay of the body? To answer

that question is one of the fundamental problems of natural theology, not indeed in the full sense of the word theology, if we confine the term strictly to a reasoned knowledge of a God; for the example of Buddhism proves that a belief in the existence of the human soul after death is quite compatible with disbelief in a deity. But if we may use, as I think we may, the phrase natural theology in an extended sense to cover theories which, though they do not in themselves affirm the existence of a God, nevertheless appear to be one of the deepest and most fruitful sources of the belief in his reality, then we may legitimately say that the doctrine of human immortality does fall within the scope of natural theology. What then is its origin? How is it that men so commonly believe themselves to be immortal?

If there is any natural knowledge of human immortality, it must be acquired either by intuition or by experience; there is no other way. Now whether other men from a simple contemplation of their own nature, quite apart from reasoning, know or believe themselves intuitively to be immortal, I cannot say; but I can say with some confidence that for myself I have no such intuition whatever of my own immortality, and that if I am left to the resources of my natural faculties alone, I can as little affirm the certain or probable existence of my personality after death as I can affirm the certain or probable existence of a personal God. And I am bold enough to suspect that if men could analyse their own ideas they would generally find themselves to be in a similar predicament as to both these profound topics. Hence I incline to lay it down as a probable proposition that men as a rule have no intuitive knowledge of their own immortality,

and that if there is any natural knowledge of such a thing it can only be acquired by a process of reasoning from experience.

What then is the kind of experience from which the theory of human immortality is deduced? Is it our experience of the operations of our own minds? or is it our experience of external nature? As a matter of historical fact—and I am treating the question purely from the historical standpoint—men seem to have inferred the persistence of their personality after death both from the one kind of experience and from the other, that is, both from the phenomena of their inner life and from the phenomena of what we conventionally call the external world. Thus the savage finds a very strong argument for immortality in the phenomena of dreams, which are strictly a part of his inner life, though in his ignorance he commonly fails to discriminate them from what we popularly call waking realities. Hence when the images of persons whom he knows to be dead appear to him in a dream, he naturally infers that these persons still exist somewhere and somehow apart from their bodies, of the decay or destruction of which he may have had ocular demonstration. How could he see dead people, he asks, if they did not exist? To argue that they have perished like their bodies is to contradict the plain evidence of his senses; for to the savage still more than to the civilized man seeing is believing; that he sees the dead only in dreams does not shake his belief, since he thinks the appearances of dreams just as real as the appearances of his waking hours. And once he has in this way gained a conviction that the dead survive and can help or harm him, as they seem to do in dreams, it is natural or necessary for

him to extend the theory to the occurrences of daily life, which he does not sharply distinguish from the visions of slumber. He now explains many of these occurrences and many of the processes of nature by the direct interposition of the spirits of the departed; he traces their invisible hand in many of the misfortunes and in some of the blessings which befall him; for it is a common feature of the faith in ghosts, at least among savages, that they are usually spiteful and mischievous, or at least testy and petulant, more apt to injure than to benefit the survivors. In that they resemble the personified spirits of nature, which in the opinion of most savages appear to be generally tricky and malignant beings, whose anger is dangerous and whose favour is courted with fear and trembling. Thus even without the additional assurance afforded by tales of apparitions and spectres, primitive man may come in time to imagine the world around him to be more or less thickly peopled, influenced, and even dominated by a countless multitude of spirits, among whom the shades of past generations of men and women hold a very prominent, often apparently the leading, place. These spirits, powerful to help or harm, he seeks either simply to avert, when he deems them purely mischievous, or to appease and conciliate, when he supposes them sufficiently good-natured to respond to his advances. In some such way as this, arguing from the real but, as we think, misinterpreted phenomena of dreams, the savage may arrive at a doctrine of human immortality and from that at a worship of the dead.

This explanation of the savage faith in immortality is neither novel nor original: on the contrary, it is perhaps the commonest and most familiar that has yet

been propounded. If it does not account for all the facts, it probably accounts for many of them. At the same time I do not doubt that many other inferences drawn from experiences of different kinds have confirmed, even if they did not originally suggest, man's confident belief in his own immortality. To take a single example of outward experience, the resemblances which children often bear to deceased kinsfolk appear to have prompted in the minds of many savages the notion that the souls of these dead kinsfolk have been born again in their descendants. From a few cases of resemblances so explained it would be easy to arrive at a general theory that all living persons are animated by the souls of the dead; in other words, that the human spirit survives death for an indefinite period, if not for eternity, during which it undergoes a series of rebirths or reincarnations. However it has been arrived at, this doctrine of the transmigration or reincarnation of the soul is found among many tribes of savages; and from what we know on the subject we seem to be justified in conjecturing that at certain stages of mental and social evolution the belief in metempsychosis has been far commoner and has exercised a far deeper influence on the life and institutions of primitive man than the actual evidence before us at present allows us positively to affirm.

CLXII

THE DEIFICATION OF THE DEAD [1]

It may, perhaps, be laid down as a general principle that the worship of the dead tends constantly

[1] *The Belief in Immortality*, vol. ii. pp. 97-98.

to encroach on the worship of the high gods, who are pushed ever farther into the background by the advent of their younger rivals. It is natural enough that this should be so. The affection which we feel for virtue, the reverence and awe inspired by great talents and powerful characters, persist long after the objects of our love and admiration have passed away from earth, and we now render to their memories the homage which we paid, or perhaps grudged, to the men themselves in their lifetime. For us they seem still to exist; with their features, their characteristic turns of thought and speech still fresh in our memories, we can hardly bring ourselves to believe that they have utterly ceased to be, that nothing of them remains but the lifeless dust which we have committed to the earth. The heart still clings fondly to the hope, if not to the belief, that somewhere beyond our ken the loved and lost ones are joined to the kindred spirits who have gone before in that unknown land, where, in due time, we shall meet them again. And as with affection, so with reverence and fear; they also are powerful incentives to this instinctive belief in the continued existence of the dead. The busy brain that explored the heights and depths of this mysterious universe — the glowing imagination that conjured up visions of beauty born, as we fondly think, for immortality—the aspiring soul and vaulting ambition that founded or overturned empires and shook the world—are they now no more than a few mouldering bones or a handful of ashes under their marble monuments? The mind of most men revolts from a conclusion so derogatory to what they deem the dignity of human nature; and so to satisfy at once the promptings of the imagination and the

impulse of the heart, men gradually elevate their dead to the rank of saints and heroes, who in course of time may easily pass by an almost insensible transition to the supreme place of deities. It is thus that, almost as far back as we can trace the gropings of the human mind, man has been perpetually creating gods in his own likeness.

CLXIII

EUHEMERISM [1]

Whatever we may think of Euhemerism as a universal explanation of the gods, there can be no doubt that in many lands the ranks of the celestial hierarchy have been largely recruited by the ghosts of men of flesh and blood. But there appears to be a general tendency to allow the origin of the human gods to fall into the background and to confuse them with the true original deities, who from the beginning have always been deities and nothing else. The tendency may sometimes be accentuated by a deliberate desire to cast a veil over the humble birth and modest beginning of these now worshipful beings; but probably the obliteration of the distinction between the two classes of divinities is usually a simple result of oblivion and the lapse of time. Once a man is dead, his figure, which bulked so large and so clear to his contemporaries, begins to fade and melt away into something vague and indistinct, until, if he was a person of no importance, he is totally forgotten; or, if he was one whose actions or thoughts deeply influenced his fellows for good or evil, his memory

[1] *The Belief in Immortality*, vol. ii. pp. 69-70.

lingers in after generations, growing ever dimmer and it may be looming ever larger through the long vista of the ages, as the evening mist appears to magnify the orb of the descending sun. Thus naturally and insensibly, as time goes on, our mortal nature fades or brightens into the immortal and divine.

CLXIV

GREAT MEN AS FOUNDERS OF RELIGIONS [1]

If Osiris and Christ have been the centres of the like enthusiastic devotion, may not the secret of their influence have been similar? If Christ lived the life and died the death of a man on earth, may not Osiris have done so likewise? The immense and enduring popularity of his worship speaks in favour of the supposition; for all the other great religious or semi-religious systems which have won for themselves a permanent place in the affections of mankind have been founded by individual great men, who by their personal life and example exerted a power of attraction such as no cold abstractions, no pale products of the collective wisdom or folly could ever exert on the minds and hearts of humanity. Thus it was with Buddhism, with Confucianism, with Christianity, and with Mohammedanism; and thus it may well have been with the religion of Osiris. Certainly we shall do less violence to the evidence if we accept the unanimous tradition of ancient Egypt on this point than if we resolve the figure of Osiris into a myth pure and simple. And when we consider that from the earliest to the latest times Egyptian

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part IV. *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, vol. ii. pp. 159-160.

kings were worshipped as gods both in life and in death, there appears to be nothing extravagant or improbable in the view that one of them by his personal qualities excited a larger measure of devotion than usual during his life and was remembered with fonder affection and deeper reverence after his death; till in time his beloved memory, dimmed, transfigured, and encircled with a halo of glory by the mists of time, grew into the dominant religion of his people. At least this theory is reasonable enough to deserve a serious consideration. If we accept it, we may suppose that the mythical elements, which legend undoubtedly ascribed to Osiris, were later accretions which gathered about his memory like ivy about a ruin. There is no improbability in such a supposition; on the contrary, all analogy is in its favour, for nothing is more certain than that myths grow like weeds or flowers round the great historical figures of the past.

CLXV

DEMETER AND IMMORTALITY [1]

Surveying the evidence as a whole, we may say that from the myth of Demeter and Persephone, from their ritual, from their representations in art, from the titles which they bore, from the offerings of first-fruits which were presented to them, and from the names applied to the cereals, we are fairly entitled to conclude that in the mind of the ordinary Greek the two goddesses were essentially personifications of the corn, and that in this germ the whole efflorescence

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part V. *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*, vol. i. pp. 90-91.

of their religion finds implicitly its explanation. But to maintain this is not to deny that in the long course of religious evolution high moral and spiritual conceptions were grafted on this simple original stock and blossomed out into fairer flowers than the bloom of the barley and the wheat. Above all, the thought of the seed buried in the earth in order to spring up to new and higher life readily suggested a comparison with human destiny, and strengthened the hope that for man too the grave may be but the beginning of a better and happier existence in some brighter world unknown. This simple and natural reflection seems perfectly sufficient to explain the association of the Corn Goddess at Eleusis with the mystery of death and the hope of a blissful immortality. For that the ancients regarded initiation in the Eleusinian mysteries as a key to unlock the gates of Paradise appears to be proved by the allusions which well-informed writers among them drop to the happiness in store for the initiated hereafter. No doubt it is easy for us to discern the flimsiness of the logical foundation on which such high hopes were built. But drowning men clutch at straws, and we need not wonder that the Greeks, like ourselves, with death before them and a great love of life in their hearts, should not have stopped to weigh with too nice a hand the arguments that told for and against the prospect of human immortality. The reasoning that satisfied St. Paul and has brought comfort to untold thousands of sorrowing Christians, standing by the death-bed or the open grave of their loved ones, was good enough to pass muster with ancient pagans, when they too bowed their heads under the burden of grief, and, with the taper of life burning

low in the socket, looked forward into the darkness of the unknown. Therefore we do no indignity to the myth of Demeter and Persephone—one of the few myths in which the sunshine and clarity of the Greek genius are crossed by the shadow and mystery of death—when we trace its origin to some of the most familiar, yet eternally affecting aspects of nature, to the melancholy gloom and decay of autumn and to the freshness, the brightness, and the verdure of spring.

CLXVI

DEATH AND THE ROSES[1]

Thus interpreted the death of Adonis is not the natural decay of vegetation in general under the summer heat or the winter cold; it is the violent destruction of the corn by man, who cuts it down on the field, stamps it to pieces on the threshing-floor, and grinds it to powder in the mill. That this was indeed the principal aspect in which Adonis presented himself in later times to the agricultural peoples of the Levant, may be admitted; but whether from the beginning he had been the corn, and nothing but the corn, may be doubted. At an earlier period he may have been to the herdsman, above all, the tender herbage which sprouts after rain, offering rich pasture to the lean and hungry cattle. Earlier still he may have embodied the spirit of the nuts and berries which the autumn woods yield to the savage hunter and his squaw. And just as the husbandman must propitiate the spirit of the corn which he consumes, so the herdsman must appease the spirit of the grass and leaves

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part IV. *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, vol. i. pp. 232-235.

which his cattle munch, and the hunter must soothe the spirit of the roots which he digs, and of the fruits which he gathers from the bough. In all cases the propitiation of the injured and angry sprite would naturally comprise elaborate excuses and apologies, accompanied by loud lamentations at his decease whenever, through some deplorable accident or necessity, he happened to be murdered as well as robbed. Only we must bear in mind that the savage hunter and herdsman of those early days had probably not yet attained to the abstract idea of vegetation in general; and that accordingly, so far as Adonis existed for them at all, he must have been the *Adon* or lord of each individual tree and plant rather than a personification of vegetable life as a whole. Thus there would be as many Adonises as there were trees and shrubs, and each of them might expect to receive satisfaction for any damage done to his person or property. And year by year, when the trees were deciduous, every Adonis would seem to bleed to death with the red leaves of autumn and to come to life again with the fresh green of spring.

There is reason to think that in early times Adonis was sometimes personated by a living man who died a violent death in the character of the god. Further, there is evidence which suggests that among the agricultural peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean the corn-spirit, by whatever name he was known, was often represented, year after year, by human victims slain on the harvest-field. If that was so, it seems likely that the propitiation of the corn-spirit would tend to fuse to some extent with the worship of the dead. For the spirits of these victims might be thought to return to life in the ears which they had

fattened with their blood, and to die a second death at the reaping of the corn. Now the ghosts of those who have perished by violence are surly and apt to wreak their vengeance on their slayers whenever an opportunity offers. Hence the attempt to appease the souls of the slaughtered victims would naturally blend, at least in the popular conception, with the attempt to pacify the slain corn-spirit. And as the dead came back in the sprouting corn, so they might be thought to return in the spring flowers, waked from their long sleep by the soft vernal airs. They had been laid to their rest under the sod. What more natural than to imagine that the violets and the hyacinths, the roses and the anemones, sprang from their dust, were empurpled or incarnadined by their blood, and contained some portion of their spirit?

"I sometimes think that never blows so red
The Rose as where some buried Caesar bled;
That every Hyacinth the Garden wears
Dropt in her Lap from some once lovely Head.

"And this reviving Herb whose tender Green
Fledges the River-Lip on which we lean—
Ah, lean upon it lightly, for who knows
From what once lovely Lip it springs unseen?"

In the summer after the battle of Landen, the most sanguinary battle of the seventeenth century in Europe, the earth, saturated with the blood of twenty thousand slain, broke forth into millions of poppies, and the traveller who passed that vast sheet of scarlet might well fancy that the earth had indeed given up her dead. At Athens the great Commemoration of the Dead fell in spring about the middle of March, when the early flowers are in bloom. Then the dead were believed to rise from their graves and go about

the streets, vainly endeavouring to enter the temples and the dwellings, which were barred against these perturbed spirits with ropes, buckthorn, and pitch. The name of the festival, according to the most obvious and natural interpretation, means the Festival of Flowers, and the title would fit well with the substance of the ceremonies if at that season the poor ghosts were indeed thought to creep from the narrow house with the opening flowers. There may therefore be a measure of truth in the theory of Renan, who saw in the worship of Adonis a dreamy voluptuous cult of death, conceived not as the King of Terrors, but as an insidious enchanter who lures his victims to himself and lulls them into an eternal sleep. The infinite charm of nature in the Lebanon, he thought, lends itself to religious emotions of this sensuous, visionary sort, hovering vaguely between pain and pleasure, between slumber and tears. It would doubtless be a mistake to attribute to Syrian peasants the worship of a conception so purely abstract as that of death in general. Yet it may be true that in their simple minds the thought of the reviving spirit of vegetation was blent with the very concrete notion of the ghosts of the dead, who come to life again in spring days with the early flowers, with the tender green of the corn and the many-tinted blossoms of the trees. Thus their views of the death and resurrection of nature would be coloured by their views of the death and resurrection of man, by their personal sorrows and hopes and fears. In like manner we cannot doubt that Renan's theory of Adonis was itself deeply tinged by passionate memories, memories of the slumber akin to death which sealed his own eyes on the slopes of the Lebanon, memories of the sister who sleeps in

the land of Adonis never again to wake with the anemones and the roses.

CLXVII

THE MORTALITY OF THE GODS [1]

At an early stage of his intellectual development man deems himself naturally immortal, and imagines that were it not for the baleful arts of sorcerers, who cut the vital thread prematurely short, he would live for ever. The illusion, so flattering to human wishes and hopes, is still current among many savage tribes at the present day, and it may be supposed to have prevailed universally in that Age of Magic which appears to have everywhere preceded the Age of Religion. But in time the sad truth of human mortality was borne in upon our primitive philosopher with a force of demonstration which no prejudice could resist and no sophistry dissemble. Among the manifold influences which combined to wring from him a reluctant assent to the necessity of death must be numbered the growing influence of religion, which, by exposing the vanity of magic and of all the extravagant pretensions built on it, gradually lowered man's proud and defiant attitude towards nature, and taught him to believe that there are mysteries in the universe which his feeble intellect can never fathom, and forces which his puny hands can never control. Thus more and more he learned to bow to the inevitable and to console himself for the brevity and the sorrows of life on earth by the hope of a blissful eternity hereafter. But if he reluctantly acknowledged the existence of

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part III. *The Dying God*, pp. 1-3.

beings at once superhuman and supernatural, he was as yet far from suspecting the width and the depth of the gulf which divided him from them. The gods with whom his imagination now peopled the darkness of the unknown were indeed admitted by him to be his superiors in knowledge and in power, in the joyous splendour of their life and in the length of its duration. But, though he knew it not, these glorious and awful beings were merely, like the spectre of the Brocken, the reflections of his own diminutive personality exaggerated into gigantic proportions by distance and by the mists and clouds of ignorance upon which they were cast. Man in fact created gods in his own likeness, and being himself mortal he naturally supposed his creatures to be in the same sad predicament.

CLXVIII

THE SLAYING OF THE MAN-GOD [1]

The practice of putting divine men and particularly divine kings to death, which seems to have been common at a particular stage in the evolution of society and religion, was a crude but pathetic attempt to disengage an immortal spirit from its mortal envelope, to arrest the forces of decomposition in nature by retrenching with ruthless hand the first ominous symptoms of decay. We may smile if we please at the vanity of these and the like efforts to stay the inevitable decline, to bring the relentless revolution of the great wheel to a stand, to keep youth's fleeting roses for ever fresh and fair; but perhaps in spite of every disillusionment, when we contemplate

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part III. *The Dying God*, Preface, pp. v-vi.

the seemingly endless vistas of knowledge which have been opened up even within our own generation, many of us may cherish in our heart of hearts a fancy, if not a hope, that some loophole of escape may after all be discovered from the iron walls of the prison-house which threaten to close on and crush us ; that, groping about in the darkness, mankind may yet chance to lay hands on " that golden key that opes the palace of eternity ", and so to pass from this world of shadows and sorrows to a world of untroubled light and joy. If this is a dream, it is surely a happy and innocent one, and to those who would wake us from it we may murmur with Michael Angelo,

" Però non mi destar, deh ! parla basso."

CLXIX

THE EATING OF A GOD [1]

It is now easy to understand why a savage should desire to partake of the flesh of an animal or man whom he regards as divine. By eating the body of the god he shares in the god's attributes and powers. And when the god is a corn-god, the corn is his proper body ; when he is a vine-god, the juice of the grape is his blood ; and so by eating the bread and drinking the wine the worshipper partakes of the real body and blood of his god. Thus the drinking of wine in the rites of a vine-god like Dionysus is not an act of revelry, it is a solemn sacrament. Yet a time comes when reasonable men find it hard to understand how any one in his senses can suppose that by eating bread

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part V. *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*, vol. ii. pp. 167-168.

or drinking wine he consumes the body or blood of a deity. "When we call corn Ceres and wine Bacchus", says Cicero, "we use a common figure of speech; but do you imagine that anybody is so insane as to believe that the thing he feeds upon is a god?" In writing thus the Roman philosopher little foresaw that in Rome itself, and in the countries which have derived their creed from her, the belief which he here stigmatizes as insane was destined to persist for thousands of years, as a cardinal doctrine of religion, among peoples who pride themselves on their religious enlightenment by comparison with the blind superstitions of pagan antiquity. So little can even the greatest minds of one generation foresee the devious track which the religious faith of mankind will pursue in after ages.

CLXX

THE DYING GOD AS REDEEMER [1]

The dying god has sometimes been used as a scapegoat to free his worshippers from the troubles of all sorts with which life on earth is beset. I have sought to trace this curious usage to its origin, to decompose the idea of the divine scapegoat into the elements out of which it appears to be compounded. If I am right, the idea resolves itself into a simple confusion between the material and the immaterial, between the real possibility of transferring a physical load to other shoulders and the supposed possibility of transferring our bodily and mental ailments to another who will bear them for us. When we survey the history of this pathetic fallacy from its

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part VI. *The Scapegoat*, Preface, p. v.

crude inception in savagery to its full development in the speculative theology of civilized nations, we cannot but wonder at the singular power which the human mind possesses of transmuting the leaden dross of superstition into a glittering semblance of gold. Certainly in nothing is this alchemy of thought more conspicuous than in the process which has refined the base and foolish custom of the scapegoat into the sublime conception of a God who dies to take away the sins of the world.

CLXXI

THE THEORY OF DEICIDE [1]

It was in the religious ritual of the Aztecs that the theory of the dying god found its most systematic and most tragic expression. There is nothing, so far as I am aware, to show that the men and women, who in Mexico died cruel deaths in the character of gods and goddesses, were regarded as scapegoats by their worshippers and executioners ; the intention of slaying them seems rather to have been to reinforce by a river of human blood the tide of life which might else grow stagnant and stale in the veins of the deities. Hence the Aztec ritual, which prescribed the slaughter, the roasting alive, and the flaying of men and women in order that the gods might remain for ever young and strong, conforms to the general theory of deicide which I have suggested. On that theory death is a portal through which gods and men alike must pass to escape the decrepitude of age and to attain the vigour of eternal youth. The conception may be said to

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part VI. *The Scapegoat*, Preface, pp. v-vi.

culminate in the Brahmanical doctrine that in the daily sacrifice the body of the Creator is broken anew for the salvation of the world.

CLXXII

THE SACRIFICE OF A GOD FOR THE SALVATION OF THE WORLD [1]

It is possible that the sacrifices of deified men, performed for the salvation of the world, may have helped to beget the notion that the universe or some part of it was originally created out of the bodies of gods offered up in sacrifice. Certainly it is curious that notions of this sort meet us precisely in parts of the world where such sacrifices appear to have been regularly accomplished. Thus in ancient Mexico, where the sacrifice of human beings in the character of gods formed a conspicuous feature of the national religion, it is said that in the beginning, when as yet the light of day was not, the gods created the sun to illumine the earth by voluntarily burning themselves in the fire, leaping one after the other into the flames of a great furnace. Again, in the Babylonian Genesis the great god Bel created the world by cleaving the female monster Tiamat in twain and using the severed halves of her body to form the heaven and the earth. Afterwards, perceiving that the earth was waste and void, he obligingly ordered one of the gods to cut off his, the Creator's, own head, and with the flowing blood mixed with clay he kneaded a paste out of which he moulded men and animals. Similarly in a hymn of the Rig Veda we read how the gods created

[1] *The Golden Bough*, Part VI. *The Scapegoat*, pp. 409-411.

the world out of the dismembered body of the great primordial giant Purushu. The sky was made out of his head, the earth out of his feet, the sun out of his eye, and the moon out of his mind; animals and men were also engendered from his dripping fat or his limbs, and the great gods Indra and Agni sprang from his mouth. The crude, nay savage, account of creation thus set forth by the poet was retained by the Brahman doctors of a later age and refined by them into a subtle theory of sacrifice in general. According to them the world was not only created in the beginning by the sacrifice of the Creator Prajapati, the Lord of Creatures; to this day it is renewed and preserved solely by a repetition of that mystic sacrifice in the daily sacrificial ritual celebrated by the Brahmans. Every day the body of the Creator and Saviour is broken anew, and every day it is pieced together for the restoration and conservation of a universe which otherwise must dissolve and be shattered into fragments. Thus is the world continually created afresh by the self-sacrifice of the deity; and, wonderful to relate, the priest who offers the sacrifice identifies himself with the Creator, and so by the very act of sacrificing renews the universe and keeps up uninterrupted the revolution of time and matter. All things depend on his beneficent, nay divine activity, from the heaven above to the earth beneath, from the greatest god to the meanest worm, from the sun and moon to the humblest blade of grass and the minutest particle of dust. Happily this grandiose theory of sacrifice as a process essential to the salvation of the world does not oblige the priest to imitate his glorious prototype by dismembering his own body and shedding his own blood on the altar;

on the contrary, a comfortable corollary deduced from it holds out to him the pleasing prospect of living for the unspeakable benefit of society to a good old age, indeed of stretching out the brief span of human existence to a full hundred years. Well is it, not only for the priest but for mankind, when with the slow progress of civilization and humanity the hard facts of a cruel ritual have thus been softened and diluted into the nebulous abstractions of a mystical theology.

CLXXIII

THE QUESTION OF IMMORTALITY [1]

It is impossible not to be struck by the strength, and perhaps we may say the universality, of the natural belief in immortality among the savage races of mankind. With them a life after death is not a matter of speculation and conjecture, of hope and fear; it is a practical certainty which the individual as little dreams of doubting as he doubts the reality of his conscious existence. He assumes it without inquiry and acts upon it without hesitation, as if it were one of the best-ascertained truths within the limits of human experience. The belief influences his attitude towards the higher powers, the conduct of his daily life, and his behaviour towards his fellows; more than that, it regulates to a great extent the relations of independent communities to each other. For the state of war, which normally exists between many, if not most, neighbouring savage tribes, springs in large measure directly from their belief in immortality; since one of the commonest motives for hostility is

[1] *The Belief in Immortality*, vol. i. pp. 468-471.

a desire to appease the angry ghosts of friends, who are supposed to have perished by the baleful arts of sorcerers in another tribe, and who, if vengeance is not inflicted on their real or imaginary murderers, will wreak their fury on their undutiful fellow-tribesmen. Thus the belief in immortality has not merely coloured the outlook of the individual upon the world ; it has deeply affected the social and political relations of humanity in all ages ; for the religious wars and persecutions, which distracted and devastated Europe for ages, were only the civilized equivalents of the battles and murders which the fear of ghosts has instigated amongst almost all races of savages of whom we possess a record. Regarded from this point of view, the faith in a life hereafter has been sown like dragons' teeth on the earth and has brought forth crop after crop of armed men, who have turned their swords against each other. And when we consider further the gratuitous and wasteful destruction of property as well as of life which is involved in sacrifices to the dead, we must admit that, with all its advantages, the belief in immortality has entailed heavy economical losses upon the races—and they are practically all the races of the world—who have indulged in this dear-bought luxury. It is not for me to estimate the extent and gravity of the consequences, moral, social, political, and economic, which flow directly from the belief in immortality. I can only point to some of them and commend them to the serious attention of historians and economists, as well as of moralists and theologians.

But even when we have left out of account the practical consequences of the belief, we are still confronted by the question of its truth or falsehood. I must leave to others the delicate task of placing

the evidence in the scales and saying whether it inclines the balance for or against the truth of this momentous belief, which has been so potent for good or ill in history. In every inquiry much depends upon the point of view from which the inquirer approaches his subject; he will see it in different proportions and in different lights according to the angle and the distance from which he regards it. The subject under discussion in the present case is human nature itself; and, as we all know, men have formed very different estimates of themselves and their species. On the one hand, there are those who love to dwell on the grandeur and dignity of man, and who swell with pride at the contemplation of the triumphs which his genius has achieved in the visionary world of imagination as well as in the realm of nature. Surely, they say, such a glorious creature was not born for mortality, to be snuffed out like a candle, to fade like a flower, to pass away like a breath. Is all that penetrating intellect, that creative fancy, that vaulting ambition, those noble passions, those far-reaching hopes, to come to nothing, to shrivel up into a pinch of dust? It is not so, it cannot be. Man is the flower of this wide world, the lord of creation, the crown and consummation of all things, and it is to wrong him and his creator to imagine that the grave is the end of all. To those who take this lofty view of human nature it is easy and obvious to find in the similar beliefs of savages a welcome confirmation of their own cherished faith, and to insist that a conviction so widely spread and so firmly held must be based on some principle, call it instinct or intuition or what you will, which is deeper than logic and cannot be confuted by reasoning.

On the other hand, there are those who take a different view of human nature, and who find in its contemplation a source of humility rather than of pride. They remind us how weak, how ignorant, how short-lived is man, how infirm of purpose, how purblind of vision, how subject to pain and suffering, to diseases that torture the body and wreck the mind. They say that if the few short years of his life are not wasted in idleness and vice, they are spent for the most part in a perpetually recurring round of trivialities, in the satisfaction of merely animal wants, in eating, drinking, and slumber. When they survey the history of mankind as a whole, they find the record chequered and stained by folly and crime, by broken faith, insensate ambition, wanton aggression, injustice, cruelty, and lust, and seldom illumined by the mild radiance of wisdom and virtue. And when they turn their eyes from man himself to the place he occupies in the universe, how are they overwhelmed by a sense of his littleness and insignificance! They see the earth which he inhabits dwindle to a speck in the unimaginable infinities of space, and the brief span of his existence shrink into a moment in the inconceivable infinities of time. And they ask, Shall a creature so puny and frail claim to live for ever, to outlast not only the present starry system but every other that, when earth and sun and stars have crumbled into dust, shall be built upon their ruins in the long long hereafter? It is not so, it cannot be. The claim is nothing but the outcome of exaggerated self-esteem, of inflated vanity; it is the claim of a moth, shrivelled in the flame of a candle, to outlive the sun, the claim of a worm to survive the destruction of this terrestrial globe in which it burrows. Those who take this view of the

pettiness and transitoriness of man compared with the vastness and permanence of the universe find little in the beliefs of the savages to alter their opinion. They see in savage conceptions of the soul and its destiny nothing but a product of childish ignorance, the hallucinations of hysteria, the ravings of insanity, or the concoctions of deliberate fraud and imposture. They dismiss the whole of them as a pack of superstitions and lies, unworthy the serious attention of a rational mind; and they say that if such drivellings do not refute the belief in immortality, as indeed from the nature of things they cannot do, they are at least fitted to invest its high-flown pretensions with an air of ludicrous absurdity.

Such are the two opposite views which I conceive may be taken of the savage testimony to the survival of our conscious personality after death. I do not presume to adopt the one or the other. I leave the reader to draw his own conclusion.

CLXXIV

THE ASSUMPTION OF AN EXTERNAL WORLD [1]

The mind of man refuses to acquiesce in the phenomena of sense. By an instinctive, an irresistible impulse it is driven to seek for something beyond, something which it assumes to be more real and abiding than the shifting phantasmagoria of this sensible world. This search and this assumption are not peculiar to philosophers; they are shared in varying degrees by every man and woman born into the world.

[1] *The Worship of Nature*, vol. i. pp. 1-3.

Take, for example, a ploughman. He wakes at cock-crow and prepares to begin the familiar round of labour. He sees his wife lighting the cottage fire and preparing his morning meal, his children gathering expectant round the table : he hears the crackling of the fire on the hearth, the lowing of cows, the distant bleating of sheep and barking of dogs. And with these sights before his eyes and these sounds in his ears he has more or less consciously in his mind the scene that awaits him in the fields and on the way to it. He has a vision, for a vision it is, of the village church and churchyard with its solemn yews and its grassy mounds sleeping in the morning sunshine ; of the turn in the road where he catches a glimpse of a winding river and of far blue hills ; of the gate opening into the field where he is to toil till evening, pacing behind the plough drawn by the patient horses up and down the long furrows of upturned brown earth. He does not reflect on these things, still less does he question their reality. He assumes that they exist somewhere outside and independently of him, and that other eyes will see the old familiar scenes and that other ears will hear the old familiar sounds when his own are stopped for ever in the churchyard mould.

In the same way every one of us is perpetually, every hour of the day, implicitly constructing a purely imaginary world behind the immediate sensations of light and colour, of touch, of sound, and of scent which are all that we truly apprehend ; and oddly enough it is this visionary world, the creation of thought, which we dub the real world in contradistinction to the fleeting data of sense. Thus viewed, the mind of man may be likened to a wizard who, by the help of spirits or the waving of his magic wand, summons up scenes

of enchantment which, deceived by the very perfection of his art, he mistakes for realities. Only by deliberate reflection is it possible to perceive how unsubstantial, in the last resort, is the seemingly solid structure of what we call the material universe. In the literal acceptation of the word, it consists of such stuff as dreams are made of. The only difference between the dreams of sleep and the dreams which we call our waking life is the greater orderliness which distinguishes the latter. Their succession is so regular that to a great extent we can predict it with confidence, and experience daily and hourly confirms the prediction. We anticipate, for example, the sights that will meet us when we pass into the garden or the neighbouring street, and the anticipation is invariably fulfilled. This fulfilment, countless times repeated, of our expectation is perhaps the principal cause, as certainly it is the best justification, of our instinctive belief in the reality of an external world. It is this regularity in the succession of phenomena which breeds in our mind the conception of a cause ; in the last analysis cause is simply invariable sequence. The observation of such sequences is essential to the conduct, nay to the existence, of life, not only in men but in animals ; with its help we are able to foresee the future and to adapt ourselves to it ; without it we must perish prematurely.

But while mankind in general tacitly assumes that behind the phenomena of sense there is a real world of a more substantial and abiding nature, there are men who occupy themselves by predilection with the investigation of that assumed external world. They ask, Is there really such a world hidden behind the veil of sensible phenomena ? and if so, what are its

origin and nature? and what laws, if any, does it obey? The men who ask these questions as to the ultimate reality of the world are philosophers in the widest sense of the word, and, roughly speaking, their answers fall into one of two classes according as they find the ultimate reality of the world in matter or in mind. On the one view, the ultimate reality is dead, unconscious, inhuman; on the other view, it is living, conscious, and more or less analogous to human feeling and intelligence; according to the one, things existed first and mind was developed out of them afterwards; according to the other, mind existed first and created, or at all events set in order, the realm of things. On the one view, the world is essentially material; on the other, it is essentially spiritual. Broadly speaking, science accepts the former view, at least as a working hypothesis; religion unhesitatingly embraces the latter.

CLXXV

THE INCAPACITY OF THE MIND TO GRASP THE INFINITE[1]

Thought perpetually outstrips sense in the infinitely little as in the infinitely great; however far we extend the field of vision, whether to stars of unimaginable distance, or to corpuscles of unimaginable minuteness, thought still passes beyond them in the endless search after the real, the invisible, the eternal. We stand, as it were, at a point between two infinities, neither of which we can ever hope to reach, yet both of which, by the pressure of some force unknown, we are perpetually urged to pursue. Thought

[1] *The Worship of Nature*, vol. i. pp. 12-13.

is poised on a knife-edge between two abysses, into the unfathomable depths of which she is for ever peering, till her sight grows dim and her brain reels in the effort to pierce the thick gloom that closes the vista on either hand. Yet we understate the mystery that compasses about our little life when we speak of it as if it were only twofold, the mystery of the infinitely great and the mystery of the infinitely small in space; for is there not also the twofold mystery of time, the mystery of the infinite past and the mystery of the infinite future? Thus our metaphor of thought poised between two abysses needs to be corrected and expanded: not two, but four infinities, four gulfs, four bottomless chasms yawn at her feet; and down into them some Tempter—or is it some bright angel? —whispering at her ear, perpetually lures her to plunge, only, it would seem, to beat and flutter her ineffectual wings in the impenetrable darkness. Yet even here, unappalled by the apparently insoluble nature of the enigma, the human mind refuses to acquiesce in these manifold antitheses. Of late, if I apprehend it aright, philosophy or science (for on fundamental questions these two sisters, after following the circle of human knowledge in opposite directions, tend to meet and kiss at last), philosophy or science has recently been at work to simplify the ultimate problems by reducing the seemingly irreducible principles of space and time to a single reality. It is not for me to pronounce an opinion on this bold generalization. I refer to it only as perhaps the latest effort of the philosophic or scientific mind to unify and harmonize the apparently heterogeneous and discordant constituents of the universe.

CLXXVI

MATERIALISM AND SPIRITUALISM[1]

Both theories aim at ascertaining and defining the ultimate reality ; the one discovers it in hydrogen and electricity, the other in a deity. How far the two supplement or conflict with each other, is a nice question, but an adequate discussion of it would require a combination of philosophic and scientific attainments to which I can lay no claim. All that I desire to point out is that both hypotheses aim at explaining and justifying our instinctive belief in the reality of a world beyond the immediate data of sense. This is no less true of the materialistic than of the spiritualistic hypothesis ; for we must constantly bear in mind that the atoms and electrons into which modern science resolves the material world are as truly beyond the reach of our senses as are gnomes and fairies, and any other spiritual beings. It is true that we may have much better reasons for believing in the existence of atoms and electrons than of ghosts and hobgoblins ; but in themselves atoms and electrons, ghosts and hobgoblins are equally hypothetical and therefore, in the strict sense of the word, imaginary, beings, invented to account for sensible phenomena. The supposed effects of both we can perceive, but not the things themselves. We can see, for example, the grassy ring which is said to be made by the feet of fairies dancing their rounds by moonlight on the greensward, but the fairies themselves we cannot see. We can perceive the bright line which is said to be the

[1] *The Worship of Nature*, vol. i. pp. 10-11.

luminous trail left behind by an atom of helium shooting athwart a darkened chamber; but the atom itself escapes our purblind vision as completely as do the fairies.

Even if, through some as yet undreamed-of refinement of our scientific instruments, atoms and electrons should be brought within the ken of our senses, can we doubt that science would at once proceed to analyse the now perceptible atoms and electrons into some minuter and imperceptible particles of matter, and so on to infinity? Already science assumes that every atom is, as it were, a little sun with planets in the form of electrons revolving about it. May it not be that each of these tiny suns comprises within itself a still tinier sun, or rather an incalculable number of such suns in the shape of atoms, and that in every one of these atoms of an atom a solar system, nay a whole starry universe, a miniature copy of ours, with all its wealth of vegetable and animal life, is, like our own, in process of evolution or decay? Conversely, we may imagine that this universe of ours, which seems to us so inconceivably vast, is no more than an atom vibrating in a vaster universe; and so on to infinity.

CLXXVII

THE UNENDING SEARCH [1]

Whichever hypothesis be adopted, the mind, in obedience to a fundamental law, seeks to form a conception which will simplify, and if possible unify, the multitudinous and seemingly heterogeneous phenomena of nature. Thus, on the materialistic hypothesis,

[1] *The Worship of Nature*, vol. i. pp. 3-5.

ancient Greek philosophers attempted to reduce the apparent multitude and diversity of things to a single element, whether it was water, or fire, or what not. Others, less ambitious, were content to postulate the existence of four distinct and irreducible elements, fire, air, earth, and water. For a long time modern chemistry continued to multiply the apparently ultimate and irreducible elements of which the material universe was believed to be composed, till the number of elements had reached some eighty-eight. But, as has been observed by an eminent philosopher of our time, science could not rest content with the theory that the universe was built up out of just eighty-eight different sorts of things, neither more nor less; to limit the kind of atoms to eighty-eight seemed as arbitrary as to limit the number of fundamental religious truths to thirty-nine. In both cases the mind naturally craves for either more or less; and for the sake of unity and simplicity it prefers less rather than more. In the case of science that craving has in recent years been satisfied by the more or less probable reduction of all the old chemical elements to the single element of hydrogen, of which the rest would appear to be only multiples. Similarly in biology the theory of evolution reduces the innumerable species of plants and animals to unity by deriving them all from a single simple type of living organism.

Thus alike in regard to the organic and the inorganic world the science of to-day has attained to that unity and simplicity of conception which the human intellect imperiously demands if it is to comprehend in some measure the infinite complexity of the universe, or rather of its shadows reflected on the illumined screen of the mind. Yet, as that complexity is in-

finite, so the search for the ultimate unity is probably endless also. For we may suspect that the finality, which seems to crown the vast generalizations of science, is after all only illusory, and that the tempting unity and simplicity which they offer to the weary mind are not the goal but only halting-places in the unending march. The fair-seeming fruit of knowledge too often turns out to be apples of Sodom. A closer inspection of the apparently simple result may reveal within it a fresh and as yet undreamed-of complexity, which in its turn may prove to be the starting-point of another quest, longer and more arduous than that which had yielded to the mind a brief and transient repose. For the thinker there is no permanent place of rest. He must move for ever forward, a pilgrim of the night eternally pressing towards the faint and glimmering illumination that eternally retreats before him. With Ulysses he may say that—

> "All experience is an arch wherethro'
> Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades
> For ever and for ever when I move."

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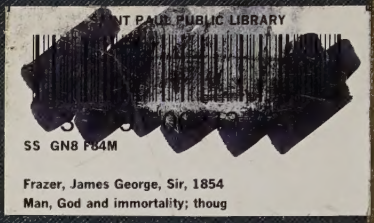

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